



GJ部

新木 伸

イラスト/あるや



DISCLAIMER: The work translated here is the legal property of its original copyright holder. It is translated here without monetary incentive solely for the purposes of promoting domestic interest in the work and improving personal language proficiency. Should the work be lincased for English translation or upon request by the original copyright holders, please stop distribution of this document at once.

Please send any and all comments to NanoDesuTranslations@gmail.com



"HEY,
K
Y
O
R
O,
I'M
B
O
R
E
D!"

GJ部

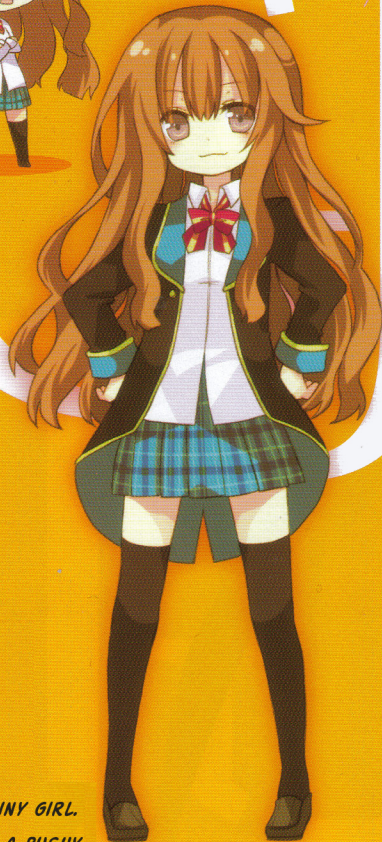
新木 伸

イラスト／あるや

部



A M
M A
A O
T
S
U
K
A
2ND YEAR HIGH SCHOOLER.



A TINY GIRL.
HAS A PUSHY
"MY WAY" KIND OF
PERSONALITY.



"I'M THE PRESIDENT!"

"PEOPLE OFTEN SAY I'M HARMLESS."



OUR PROTAGONIST
FOR THE TIME
BEING.
AN EASYGOING GUY.
HIS NICKNAME IS
"KYORO".

S K
H Y
I O
N U
O Y
M A
I Y A

1ST YEAR HIGH SCHOOLER.



"WOULD YOU LIKE

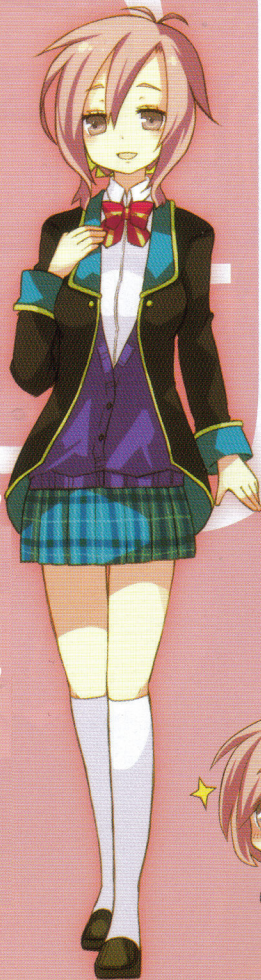
ANOTHER CUP OF TEA?"

THE PRESIDENT'S
LITTLE SISTER.

SHE DOES THINGS
IN HER OWN PACE
LIKE HER
BIG SISTER.

A
M
E
A
G
T
U
S
M
U
K
A

1ST YEAR HIGH SCHOOLER.

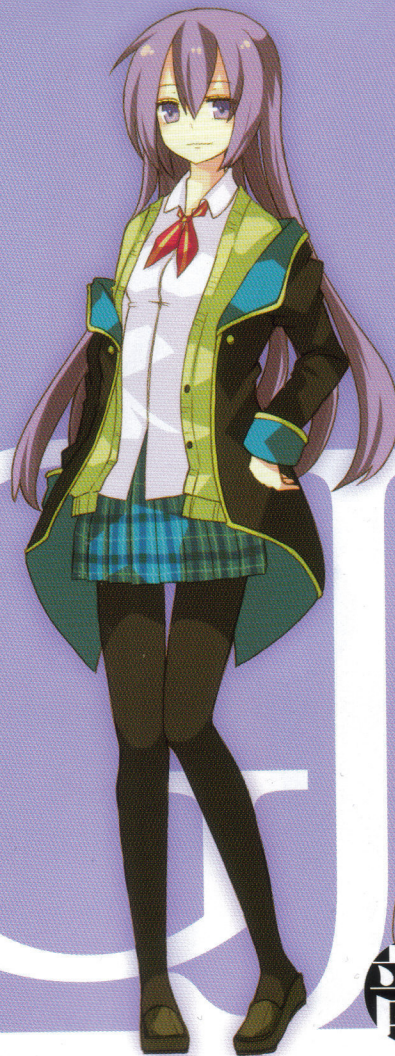


"AREN'T YOU CUTE?"

S
H
I
O
N

2ND YEAR HIGH SCHOOLER.

A GENIUS AND A
MATURE PERSON.
SHE'S AN
ATTRACTIVE GIRL.
OFTEN TEASES
KYOUYA.



GJ 部

新木 伸

イラスト/あるや
デザイン/伸童舎

K
I
R
A
R
A
2ND YEAR HIGH SCHOOLER.

"KIRARA. DON'T WORRY."

A MYSTERIOUS GIRL
WHO'S ALWAYS LAZING
AROUND.

LOVES PHYSICAL CONTACT.

部

An anime-style illustration of three characters in a school clubroom. In the foreground, a girl with long purple hair and a white shirt with a red bow sits at a white table, holding a blue book. A steaming cup of tea sits on the table. To her right, a girl with short red hair and a brown jacket over a purple shirt stands, holding a small white cup. In the background, a boy with spiky blonde hair and a dark jacket stands near a large window, holding a piece of food. The room has large windows with a view of trees outside.

AT THE TIME,
SOME CHERRY
BLOSSOM
PETALS WERE
STILL LEFT ON
THE TREES.

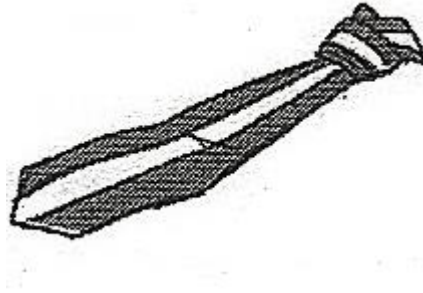
KYOUYA HAD
WALKED INTO
THE FORMER
SCHOOL BUILDING
TO VISIT THE
CULTURE CLUB
WHEN HE WAS
FORCEFULLY
BROUGHT INTO
THIS CLUBROOM.

Contents

Chapter 1.....	1
Chapter 2.....	10
Chapter 3.....	19
Chapter 4.....	27
Chapter 5.....	36
Chapter 6.....	44
Chapter 7.....	53
Chapter 8.....	61
Chapter 9.....	69
Chapter 10.....	77
Chapter 11.....	86
Chapter 12.....	94
Chapter 13.....	102
Chapter 14.....	110
Chapter 15.....	118
Chapter 16.....	126
Chapter 17.....	134
Chapter 18.....	143
Chapter 19.....	152
Chapter 20.....	161
Chapter 21.....	170

Table of Contents

Chapter 22.....	179
Chapter 23.....	188
Chapter 24.....	197
Chapter 25.....	205
Chapter 26.....	213
Chapter 27.....	223
Chapter 28.....	231
Chapter 29.....	239
Chapter 30.....	247
Chapter 31.....	255
Chapter 32.....	263
Chapter 33.....	269
Chapter 34.....	276
Chapter 35.....	284
Chapter 36.....	290
4Koma.....	300
Afterword.....	301
Credits.....	306



Chapter 1 Necktie

"Hey, your necktie."

At the round table as usual, while sitting beside Kyouya, Mao poked him with her elbow.

"Hmm... right."

Kyouya noticed what she was telling him; his necktie had become loose. He recalled that it had been a little hot during fifth period.

"Let's see..."

Unfastening the necktie in one movement, he started to retie it.

"Huh?"

He couldn't tie it properly. The length wasn't right at all. Once more he tried from the start.

"Huh??"

Another blunder. The knot's shape was not supposed to look artistic like that. He couldn't understand it. Discarding it, he went back to the start, yet again.

"..."

Kyouya could tell, and it was plain to see, that Mao was starting to feel irritated. That was a dangerous sign.

Ever since he entered High School, from the first time he had needed to wear a tie, he had never gotten used to tying it.

Now, in late May, his success rate was about one out of every three tries. Having messed up two times, the third time became a challenge. As Shion might have put it, it couldn't be denied that the probability of success was quite high now.

"Oh..."

A blunder again. This time the knot was too tight. Being so tense, he ended up putting too much strength into it... all because Mao wouldn't stop looking at him.

"Hey, Megu. Give it a go!"

Mao signaled to Megumi with her chin. After turning off the stove's fire, the girl approached them.

"Okay, Shinomiya-kun. Excuse me; please don't move for a bit."

As she extended her pale hands, Kyouya stood to attention. Megumi's hands moved swiftly and skillfully.

"Alright. It's done."

"Thank Y..."

Kyouya's words were cut short. With his hands he could feel his necktie had been done in the form of a sideways butterfly.

"This isn't a girl's ribbon!"

"I wouldn't know how to do a man's tie. I'm just a girl after all."

Mao prostrated herself on the table, laughing silently. She looked almost as if she'd pass out from the amusement. Taking half a minute to catch her breath, she faced Kyouya while wiping away tear away.

"Give it to me. Let me do it."

"President, are you sure you can do it?"

"Who do you think I am? I'm your President, you know? Whatever, just stay still... don't move!"

While facing Mao who was standing on a chair, Kyouya stood motionless.

He became mindful of the feeling of Mao's small hands around his neck. Then, suddenly...

"Ack!"

"Like this, right? And this goes here..."

Mao was tightly fastening the knot, causing Kyouya to choke.

"Pre-ck... President! I can't brea..."

"Stop, Mao! He'll die. You're not paying attention to him are you? I'll do it."

"Can... can you do it, Shion-san?"

After the past two attempts, Kyouya had grown cautious enough to question the third challenger.

"I've never actually tied up a necktie, but I'm well acquainted with knots. Topologically, they have a very simple structure. Naturally, once you understand it, it's possible to reproduce it."

Kyouya stood like a pole, entrusting himself to the older girl's fingers.

As Shion's thin fingers moved around his neck, Kyouya felt a light surprise at how different each of the girls' hands felt.

"Huh?"

Shion spoke in an ominous tone.

"This is strange. I should have been able to perfectly reproduce it, but..."

The knot had been tied perfectly, but the length of the front and back parts of the tie were absolutely wrong.

It was hopeless. He'd completely forgotten that, although Shion was a genius at games and puzzles, when it came to day to day activities she was a disappointment.

"Enough already! I'll do it myself! I can get it right once in three tries."

As soon as Kyouya shouted that, from the other side of the room a girl suddenly showed up. He had entirely forgotten about Kirara.

"I do it?"¹

Kirara asked. Kyouya nodded slightly.

Bitting down on the meat she held to free her hands, Kirara reached for Kyouya's neck.

The warmth of her fingertips that he felt on his neck lasted for a mere one or two seconds.

"You're done?"

¹ Kirara speaks broken Japanese. The reasons for it will be clear soon.

He checked with his hands. It was perfect.

"T-thanks... Thank you."

"Hm."

While Kyouya stood surprised and thanked her, Kirara narrowed her eyes to the shape of semicircles.



QUICK FACTS:

What is the GJ Club?²

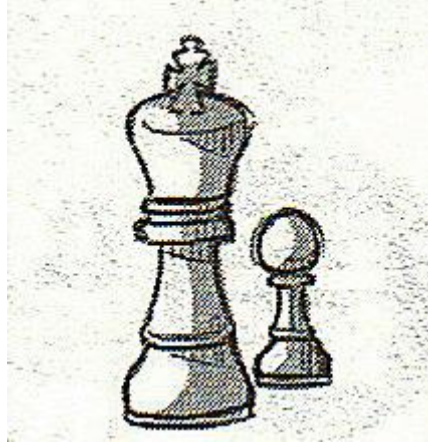
A mysterious club whose true nature is unknown.

It's main activities are chatting and drinking tea in the clubroom after school.

It has 4 + 1 members.

Led by their president Amatsuka Mao, no one there is normal.

² GJ-Bu, written as GJ 部 on the original, is a pun on the expression “good job” , which is pronounced “gujjobu” in english, and the word for club, which is pronounced simply bu.



Chapter 2: Game Master

A certain day, after school.

Surprisingly, not many people were in the room. Kyouya was alone with Shion.

With nobody to make him tea, Kyouya sat alone at the round table.

“No one’s coming today, right?”

“Yes, it seems so.”

Shion was facing the computer. Only the clicking of the mouse resounded through the room.

The girl was a mysterious person, always playing some game. Never anything like a cellphone game though, she always played classic games.

Actual games, that used boards and pieces.

At the computer, Shion would always play games alone that were originally meant to be played with two people, moving the pieces for both sides herself.

However, not today.

The screen of the computer, which was connected to the Internet, had black and white squares laid across.

Even Kyouya knew the name of that game. It was chess, the western version of shogi.

“Are you playing against someone?”

“Yeah.”

“That’s unusual.”

“It’s been a month.”

Shion swiped, to her back, the hair that was falling down her cheek; her long, glossy black hair that looked as if it would reach all the way to the floor.

Being very intelligent, she often talked in very peculiar ways. She'd answer the questions before even being asked. Because of that, it was often hard to engage in conversation with her.

Right now, she probably meant it had been a month since the last time she played against a human.

"Who are you playing against?"

Kyouya pulled a chair to her side to watch the match.

"The one I've been playing up till now was the pan-American chess champion."

Shion said casually.

"What?"

After being baffled for a while, Kyouya came back to his senses. Approaching the girl by just another 30 centimeters, he peeked at the screen.

“Isn’t that like a really amazing person?”

“Yes. He’s even more amazing now that he faced the British champion at the world championship and became the world’s best player.”

“The world’s best...”

Kyouya couldn’t put two sentences together.

“Even if it’s over the Internet, if that person is granting you a match... could it be that you’re a really amazing player?”

“The one who asked for the match was him.”

“Eh?”

Looking closer at the CRT monitor, at the opponent’s side there was a mark indicating he was the challenger.

“I had promised him.”

“That champion?”

“Yeah. A long time ago, I promised on an impulse that I’d practice with him if he became world champion.”

“What?”

“I was so young too. That was when I was eight years old.”

“Ehh!?”

Kyouya involuntarily let out a loud voice.

The match quietly proceeded. Only the clicking of the mouse could be heard.

In contrast to her opponent who would make his moves after much consideration, Shion played her turn in practically no time.

Before long, a message appeared. “I surrender. Complete defeat.” it said. One could easily imagine he meant that as praise to Shion.

“So... Er, well... Did you just beat the world champion?”

“As you can see.”

Shion spun her chair to face Kyouya, the tips of her long black hair drawing and arc on the air.

“Would you like to try it? He’s asking for a rematch.”

“No way! There’s no way I can go against the world champion! I don’t even know the rules to begin with!”

“I have a great book. Why don’t you take this chance to learn the rules?”

She pointed to the shelf beside her.

Along with some computer manuals, a chess primer rested on the shelf.

That’s when he finally realized.

“Are you making fun of me by any chance?”

“You’re cute.”

Shion pulled her side bangs behind her ears with a light smile.

Just when had she started messing with him? From the start? If not, then...



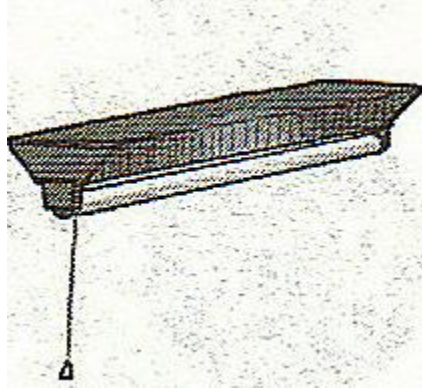
CHARACTER PROFILE:

Shion – Part 1

An intellectual girl with beautiful black hair.

An undisputed game genius. That's not restricted to traditional games like chess though, she prides herself in being unbeatable in anything that could be called a game.

However, when it comes to common sense she's (lethally) clueless.



Chapter 3: The President's Job

After school as always.

In the clubroom, everybody was doing what they always did: be it reading manga, enjoying one-man chess, or knitting; each one was doing what they liked.

In such a setting, only Mao was doing something unusual.

"Hng."

Standing on top of a chair, she had her hand extended towards the ceiling.

She hopped up and down, standing on the tips of her toes.

"What are you doing, president?"

Mao's eccentricities were nothing unusual but, unable to contain his irresponsible curiosity, Kyouya ended up asking her about it.

"Isn't it obvious? I'm trying to change this fluorescent light."

"Oh, so that's it."

He could see one of the lights had gone out.

On top of that, a new light bulb rested on the round table.

Kyouya understood the situation.

"It's dangerous, I'll do it."

Just seeing her standing on the tips of her toes, while swaying back and forth, was enough to give him the chills.

Kirara and Shion were both taller than her; weren't they more suitable for the task? With thoughts like that in mind, Kyouya started standing up himself.

"Don't!"

Mao's potent voice came down from above his head. It felt a little fresh hearing that voice which always came from below coming from above.

"This is the president's job."

"But you're not even close to reaching it, are you?"

Mao was extremely short. Short enough that even someone in the upper grades of elementary school might be taller than her already.

Of course she wouldn't reach the lamp just by climbing a chair.

"I don't care if it's impossible. If I say I'm doing it, I'm doing it! Taking care of the budget and the room equipment is the president's job. Obviously, that includes changing the lamp."

"I don't get it. Didn't you just say that it's impossible?"

"Please let her do it. Mao was entrusted with this by the previous president, so it's very important to her."

Shion said while taking a white piece with her black piece.

“Hey, Shii! Stop running your mouth like that!”

Mao called Shion by “Shii” and Shion addressed Mao without using honorifics. Kyouya felt this intimate girl-friend vibe from them.

What kind of person was the previous president? A boy? A girl?

While thinking about that, Kyouya returned to his chair for the time being.

Swaying left and right on the chair, with no chance of reaching the lamp, Mao continued extending her hand up.

In the end, he couldn’t just stand there watching that.

“Um...”

Kyouya looked at Shion. She played chess with an unconcerned expression.

Kirara wanted nothing to do with it. She just kept chowing down on her meat as usual.

Megumi watched the water she’d put to boil on the kettle while skillfully manipulating her two knitting needles.

It wasn't as if they were being cold hearted. These people had definitely known the previous president; that was why. That's how Kyouya explained it to himself.

Even if that was the case, he wouldn't go along with it.

"President, It's okay if I help, right?"

He placed his hands beneath Mao's armpits.

Not having much confidence in his physical strength, he wasn't sure if he could pull it off, but making up his mind, he went for it.

"Eh? Wha... Wait!"

"I did it!"

He held Mao up like you'd hold up a baby.

"Did what?! Let me down, idiot!"

Even if she continuously hit his head and struggled, she couldn't get back down to the top of the chair.

“You... what are you... have some shame!”

Mao had lost her temper, but Kyouya didn’t pay her any heed.

“I’m just helping so it’s fine, right? I’ll hold you up, so please change the lamp.”

“Listen to people when they’re talking!”

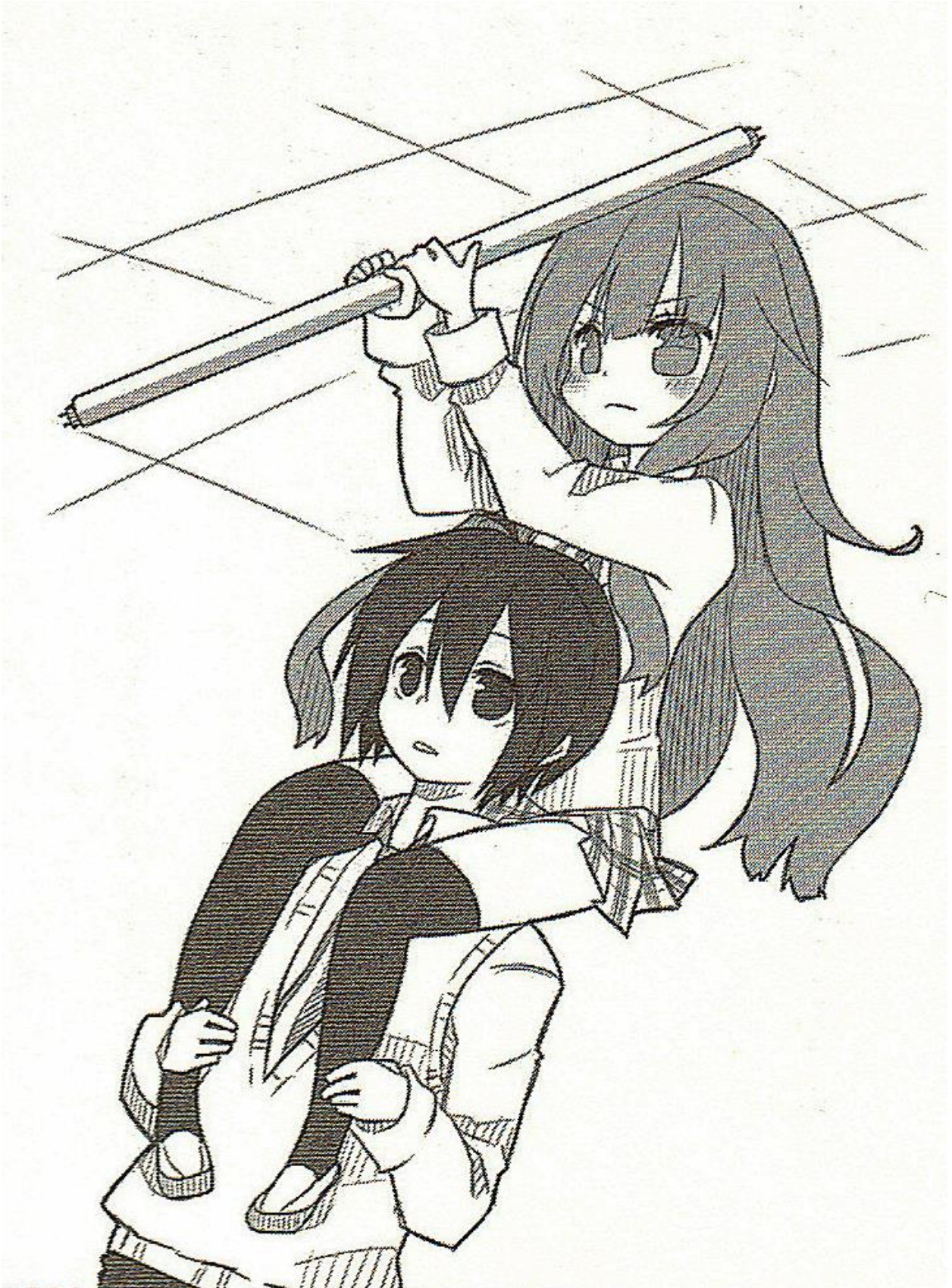
“Please let me help. I want to be helpful, okay?”

After much insistence on having things his way, Mao reluctantly nodded in agreement.

But for whatever reason, she refused to do it in that “upsies” pose.

They agreed he’d help by letting Mao ride on his shoulders.

On that day, the lamp was safely replaced... but Mao didn’t utter another word.



CHARACTER PROFILE:

Amatsuka Mao – Part 1

The president of the GJ Club.

Because of her small size she always gets mistaken for an elementary schooler, but she's actually in the second year of high school.

A strong and forceful person, she always gets her spirits up in vain.

Surprisingly, she gets lonely very easily.



Chapter 4: Nice Guy

“I’ve been thinking.”

At the sound of Megumi’s carefree voice, Kyouya looked up from the book he was reading.

“You’re a really nice guy, aren’t you, Shinomiya-kun?”

“Eh?”

Kyouya was bewildered from having that said to him all of a sudden.

Thinking that he was obviously misinterpreting the meaning of the compliment, his cheeks heated up a bit.

With Mao, Shion and Kirara being his upperclassmen, Megumi was the only one who was in the same year as him. Even if she was from another class, they were both fellow first years. They shared some affinity.

“Here, have some tea. It’s Assam tea, it’s recommended that you drink it with milk. Would you like me to put some in?”

“Oh, sure.”

Before his eyes, Megumi poured the milk into the black tea.

A white whirlpool swirled around the cup. The scent that spread through the air gently gave rise to a sweetness deep within his nose.

Kyouya didn’t know the names of any of the teas that Megumi came out with day after day, as if by magic, but by drinking them every day, even an amateur like him had become able tell differences in the taste and aroma.

He dimly gazed at the girl’s back as she went about her work.

Megumi was a girl who liked to be helpful to someone. At the moment, there was no one else in the room but him, so he was hogging her all to himself.

Looking either from a conservative point of view or from an objective point of view, Megumi was very cute. It wouldn’t be an exaggeration to say she was a beauty.

“Me? A nice guy? I wonder...”

“Yes, it’s true.”

Megumi gave a large, assuring nod over her shoulders.

“My sister might bite you, but you don’t get mad.”

That’s where she was going?

Having the expectations that were floating in his heart broken in an instant, Kyouya gloomily drooped his shoulders.

From the moment he joined the GJ club or even earlier, from that first day when he was kidnapped and forcefully inspected, he’d been made to realize that Megumi was a girl with an angel’s heart.

In this girl’s pure heart, everything was seen in a compassionate light.

It wasn’t just a case of a rich lady with a kind heart. It was something more extraordinary, a kindness on a global scale. In the GJ club they called it “Angelic Love”. ¹

¹ Megumi’s and Mao’s family name, Amatsuka, is written with the same characters as tenshi, angel, only pronounced differently.

And, for this girl with the angel's heart, there wasn't anybody whom she disliked.

He had never tried asking her directly though Kyouya was sure, that if he did, the answer would simply be "I love everybody in the world."

That's why it was impossible.

To begin with, if he even started to think about boy and girl issues while being faced by Megumi's bright smile, he'd feel ashamed.

"Did you know? Lately, my sister has stopped biting people."

No. She still bites.

"I guess she'll only bite you, right?"

Well, yes. Once every three days.

"Why do only I get bitten?"

"That's because you don't get angry, Shinomiya-kun."

“Hmm...”

“Because you’re a nice guy.”

“I see.”

Usually he’d think that was because he had no self-confidence, but if Megumi was telling him that, he’d start thinking that way.

“Shion-san also teases you a lot, right?”

“I get the feeling she’s toying with me.”

“That’s because she takes a fancy to you.”

“Really?”

Perhaps one could see things that way. It would be fantastic if that was the case.

“Kirara-san is very interested in you too.”

“Is that so?”

That was hard to believe. The big girl’s thoughts were the hardest to understand.

“After all, you are the only one she’ll give her meat to.”

“This doesn’t feel so bad.”

Being played around with by Shion, getting special treatment from Kirara, being condemned to a full-course black tea tasting by Megumi and getting bitten by Mao...

“I’m also very happy that you’re here with us. I have a reason to make tea.”

Megumi smiled while letting out a giggle.

While they were talking, she had already prepared the next tea.

While they were talking, Kyouya had already emptied his cup.

It was the fourth cup already. The next would be the fifth.

“I wonder what the next tea will be?” were Kyouya’s thoughts as he patted his flabby belly.



CHARACTER PROFILE:

Amatsuka Megumi – Part 1

Calm and easygoing.

She enjoys being helpful to everybody so much that she can't help herself, becoming the GJ Club's resident meddler.

A girl with an angel's heart.

All sorts of affairs are reflected in a positive light through the girls eyes.



Chapter 5: One Kirara

On that day, Kyouya was alone in the clubroom with Kirara.

Mao, Megumi and Shion were nowhere to be seen.

He wanted to try asking what everybody was doing away, but the one standing there was the tight-lipped Kirara.

He needed courage to start the conversation.

“Hey, Kirara-san.”

He tried saying over his shoulders in a casual tone.

Kirara was always sitting down by herself on the sofa in the room's inner part, quietly eating meat. It had been quite some time since he'd entered the club, but the girl's temperament was still the one thing he couldn't understand.

Actually, more than anything, he couldn't understand just what kind of club this GJ Club was. He didn't even know how to read the name right. The president would always bite him, so perhaps it stood for Good Jaw Club, a club where you train your jaw to make it good. No, that couldn't be it.

"Kirara-san?"

Having received no answer, he tried calling her again.

He turned to face her side of the room.

In that instant, Kyouya's body stiffened in surprise.

From within the darkness of the room's interior, two eyes gazed at him. Kirara had interrupted her meal and was now facing him.

"E-er..."

Without uttering a word, Kirara started walking towards him.

While walking, she licked her greasy fingers clean.

Kyouya was sitting on a chair, so Kirara's arms came from high above when she wrapped them around him.

"U-um!"

Kyouya uttered, with his neck bound and his heart accelerated.

The girl was already considerably taller than Kyouya: she gave off the vibes of an older woman. Now, this girl was being extremely physically intimate with him.

Usually, she was a very quiet girl, but what she lacked in words, physical contact abounded. She'd often grab Megumi, sniff her scent and tell her: "Good smell."

Just like that, there wasn't any particularly deep meaning to this.

She just thought of him as a harmless person. She wasn't treating him like a man.

Telling those things to himself, Kyouya started to calm down.

She sniffed his hair. He could feel a ticklish sensation on the back of his ear where her breathing struck him.

“One Kirara.”

The girl suddenly said.

“Huh? What?”

“Kyoro. Just said it.”

Kyoro was the nickname that he had reluctantly received from the other club members. It sounded a bit pitiful, but Kyouya thought of it as an affectionate pet name.

“Kyoro. Said it. Kirara-san.”

Kyouya tilted his head.

He couldn’t understand what the girl was talking about.

He did call her name just then, though.

“One Kirara.”

“Sorry?”

He really could find no meaning in the girl’s words.

Still, he knew she was trying to tell him something.

It also seemed like Kirara understood her words weren’t getting across.

The girl stopped to think with a serious face. Looking up at the ceiling, gazing at the corner of the room, she looked for the right words.

Kyouya watched the girl attentively.

With much effort, she finally found them.

With a proud face on, Kirara explained to Kyoro.

“One Kirara. Not three.”

Now it was Kyouya’s turn to make an effort.

He thought about the meaning of those words.

Finally, he realized it. At least he felt like he did.

The problem was in the “Kirara-san” he’d used to call her.

She’d probably thought that “san” stood for the number three, even though he was just trying to be polite, seeing as she was in her second year and his senior.¹

“Well then, let’s see... Kirara.”

Kyouya very timidly said, dropping the honorific.

However, it seemed like he’d been right.

A heartfelt smile rose to the girl’s face.

¹ “san” means “three” in Japanese as well as being a polite honorific.



"One Kirara. Not three."

CHARACTER PROFILE:

Kirara – Part 1

A mysterious girl. Silent and with a tall figure.

She's always hungry and always eating something. (Usually meat)

Her speech pattern is a bit eccentric.

Maybe you could call her animal-like?



Chapter 6: You Need a Nickname

A certain day. The day when they decided on Kyouya's nickname.

"I guess a nickname really is a must, right?"

Mao suddenly said.

"It is, isn't it?"

Shion expressed her agreement.

"That's a nice idea."

"Aye, aye."

Megumi nodded. Kirara showed her agreement with a somewhat weird voice.

“A nickname for who?”

Kyouya asked.

He wasn't following their conversation very well. These four would sometimes talk as if they could communicate through telepathy.

“Yours, of course!”

Mao suddenly bit him hard in the forearm.

“Ouch! Ouch! That hurts, president!”

Once she had bitten down, Mao wouldn't let go easily.

She finally got separated when Shion and the others held her by the legs and pulled her off.

“Jeez, you didn't have to bite so deep. Look, now I have teeth marks.”

“It's because you acted as if it was somebody else's business, and here we were talking about choosing a nickname for you.”

“That’s a nice dental arc, president.”

Kyouya said, looking at the bite mark left on his arm.

“Shut up! I’ll bite you again.”

“Why?”

“When dealing with people who ignore what others are saying, or people who don’t listen to you, they won’t get it unless you bite them.”

“Aren’t those two the same thing?”

“Gaah!”

He got bitten again.

This time, Shion didn’t come to pull Mao off.

“What do you mean with a nickname, anyway? If you need a name I already have one. It’s Kyouya.”

Kyouya said, massaging his arms which now had twice as many teeth marks.

“Rejected. That’s too respectable.”

“Choosing a pet name is a very big deal after all.”

Megumi said joining the palms of her hands.

“In that case, I think the only way to do it is deciding based on our impressions. How about it, Shion-san?”

The girl was an angel, but in this case he couldn’t expect any help from her. Kyouya’s predicament was no doubt viewed through those angel eyes as some sort of heartwarming story. The fact that she was the only one saying “pet name” while everyone else said “nickname” was evidence of that.

“Impressions, huh?”

Mao folded her arms. Her face showed that she was enjoying herself tremendously.

“White Rice.”

Shion said absentmindedly.

“Why White Rice?”

“It goes with everything. I was thinking about how it could express his lack of idiosyncrasies.”

“Right...”

Mao had an uncomfortable face.

“I’m sorry... I guess that wasn’t funny. I’m not good with jokes.”

Shion earnestly put herself to think about her next joke. “Plain Yogurt?” Her lips murmured.

“Kirara, you have anything?”

Mao switched the conversation to Kirara.

Kyouya felt an uneasiness as the girl’s mysterious eyes gazed at him.

His eyes restlessly darted around.¹

“Tasty?”

Kirara abruptly said something weird.

The meaning for that was... even Kyouya couldn’t understand it.

“Alright, Tasty White Rice it is.”

Delighted, Mao slapped her knees.

“Please, don’t settle on that! And please don’t combine them either!”

“How about Kyoro-san?”

Megumi, who had been deep in thought all this time, said then.

¹ This paragraph describes Kyouya’s action with “Kyoro Kyoro”, which is a Japanese onomatopoeia for eyes wandering around.

“Just take Kyouya-san and mix it with how his eyes were darting around just now.”

“Oh yeah, he’s always doing that, isn’t he? Alright, it’s decided!”

Kyouya didn’t say a word. He felt that if he said anything they might go back to Tasty White Rice. On top of that, he had no complaints about it. After all; it felt like a normal nickname and it had been given to him by Megumi.

And that’s how Kyouya’s nickname was decided.



"Isn't Kyoro kinda pitiful?"

CHARACTER PROFILE:

Shinomiya Kyouya – Part 1

An easygoing pacifist. He won't complain about or oppose anything.

He doesn't really have any strong points, nor any weak points for that matter.

A protagonist who's the personification of normality.



Chapter 7: Shake!

“Shake!”

Mao suddenly said. Kyouya, who had been reading a light novel at the round table as always, raised his eyes to hers.

“Why?”

She was probably bored, he thought to himself, but he might as well ask.

“Shake!”

That was all Mao would say. She anxiously extended her hand out with the palm facing up.

Kyouya looked back and forth between her hand and her face, which showed great anticipation.

“Okay.”

Not feeling like opposing her, on the contrary, feeling he should go along with her, Kyouya gently placed his hand on top of hers.

“Alright.”

Mao smiled with satisfaction. With her other hand she patted Kyouya’s head.

“Good boy, good boy.”

Getting his head patted felt somewhat pleasant and somewhat embarrassing.

“Can we stop now?”

Unable to bear the embarrassment, Kyouya motioned to go back to his novel.

However, Mao didn’t allow that.

“Sit!”

“You know, president...”

“Sit!”

“That’s what I’m trying to say...”

“Sit!”

No matter what he said, it was useless.

Kyouya had completely given up. On top of a chair, he gracefully assumed a “sit” pose.

“Alright! Good boy, good boy.”

Mao stood up from her chair and came to his side to pat him. Kyouya silently let himself be patted.

“Have a reward.”

Mao’s hand moved.

From the top of the table she took a cookie and threw it down on the floor.

She directed a face at Kyouya that seemed to be anxiously expecting something.

“Reward!”

She repeated.

“Alright!”

She said, pointing to the cookie at the floor.

This “alright” could only mean one thing. First it was “shake”, then “sit”, so now it would be “wait for it” and then “alright”.

In other words, she meant “Alright! You can eat.”

Should he pick it up and eat it... or did he have to eat it without using his hands?

Sinking into these desperate thoughts, Kyouya looked up at Mao.

After successfully having Kyouya perform two orders, her face showed an unbelievable amount of expectation. Her eyes were sparkling.

Looking to the corner of the room, Kyouya sought help from Shion, who was playing a game of chess by herself.

Shion raised a finger. “No chance. You should have refused her from the start.” Her face said as she swung it left and right like a metronome.

It was no use.

He shifted his eyes to Kirara. The girl stopped eating her meat and looked his way.

Pulling her legs up on the sofa she assumed a “sit” pose too.

She looked greedily at the cookie on the floor.

She wanted the reward, right? That was it... right?

“Alright! Reward! Alright!”

Mao vividly swung her hand, indicating the cookie on the floor.

In order to protect that smile, Kyouya had decided that he would let go of a lot of things that were important to him as a person.

“That’s wrong, Mao!”

Suddenly, a delightful voice sounded.

Rushing from the other end of the room, Megumi gave her sister’s head a hit from above.

His savior had appeared.

Megumi was indeed an angel after all.

She had rushed all the way over from the other side of the room to save Kyouya.

“You shouldn’t play around with food like that. The Ghost of Waste will come to haunt you at night. He’ll eat you completely, starting from the head. I’m telling you, he exists. I’ve seen it with my own eyes.”

That’s all that was wrong?



もっ たい
勿体ないオバケって
なんでしょう？



さあな見たことねえし。



ぼく
僕が思うに、でっかい口を
持った怪獣^{かい じゅう}じゃないかと
思うんです。



“I wonder what the Ghost of Waste is like?”

“Who knows? I’ve never seen it.”

“I’d think it’s this huge monster with a really big mouth.”



Chapter 8: This Ain't Coffee

“This coffee is a little strange.”

Shion suddenly said.

“Eh? What’s wrong?”

The girl knew an awful lot about coffee and always drank from her personal thermos flask. Today, however, she was drinking it from a can.

“It tastes weird.”

Taking the can in her hands, the girl tilted her head.

One more time, she brought the can to her lips.

“Wait a minute!”

Kyouya said, halting her. He rushed to her side.

If this was some sort of prank it could be dangerous. There were also frequent reports on the news of incidents where agrochemicals were put in people's drinks.

"Let me have a look."

"Huh?"

"It's alright."

Using a decisive tone of voice, he took the can from Shion's hands.

He took a sip and tried holding it in his mouth, completely prepared to spit it out immediately in the event he tasted something unusual.

"There's nothing wrong with it."

All he tasted was the completely normal, sweetened taste of canned coffee.

"No, it's strange."

“It is?”

“Isn’t it too sweet?”

“That’s how it’s supposed to be.”

“But it’s strange.”

Shion refused to agree with him.

“Try drinking it one more time.”

He gave the can back to Shion and gestured for her to drink.

“Okay.”

She brought the can to her mouth.

Just as she was about to touch it with her lips, her movement suddenly stopped.

“Ah...”

The girl stared at the mouth of the can.

She raised her eyes to face Kyouya.

Blinking several times in agitation, her noble and intellectual face was now tinged in the color of panic.

Kyouya was faced with eyes that looked like they had been traumatized by something.

“What happened?”

“No. I...”

Kyouya gazed intently at her as he waited for an answer. She broke eye contact with him and looked to the right, then to the left. He couldn’t make any sense of her reaction.

“I mean, isn’t that inappropriate?”

“What is? Anyway, there was nothing weird about the taste.”

“No, that’s not the point I was trying to make. Never mind, it was my mistake. There was no need for you to taste it for me. W-... What do I do now? There’s still some left.”

“Go ahead and drink it. There’s nothing wrong with it.”

“D-do I really have to?”

For some reason, the girl insisted on being stubborn.

But Kyouya understood, in a general sense, what was wrong. What the girl usually drank was the specially made Master’s Coffee. One of her older brothers was known as a “coffee master”, or so it seemed. He’d make her a thermos filled with delicious coffee; this girl who’d been drinking nothing but his authentic, tasty coffee couldn’t grasp that the canned stuff was even coffee, right?

It was true that they could probably be considered different beverages altogether.

Even Kyouya, who didn’t like coffee, could easily drink the canned one.

“It’s a waste to throw it away.”

“But still...”

“Alright, I’ll drink it then. Give it here.”

The girl handed it to him reluctantly.

She watched closely as Kyouya drank the coffee down; her face showed that she wanted to say something.

What could that be?

Feeling somewhat unusual, Kyouya finished the can.

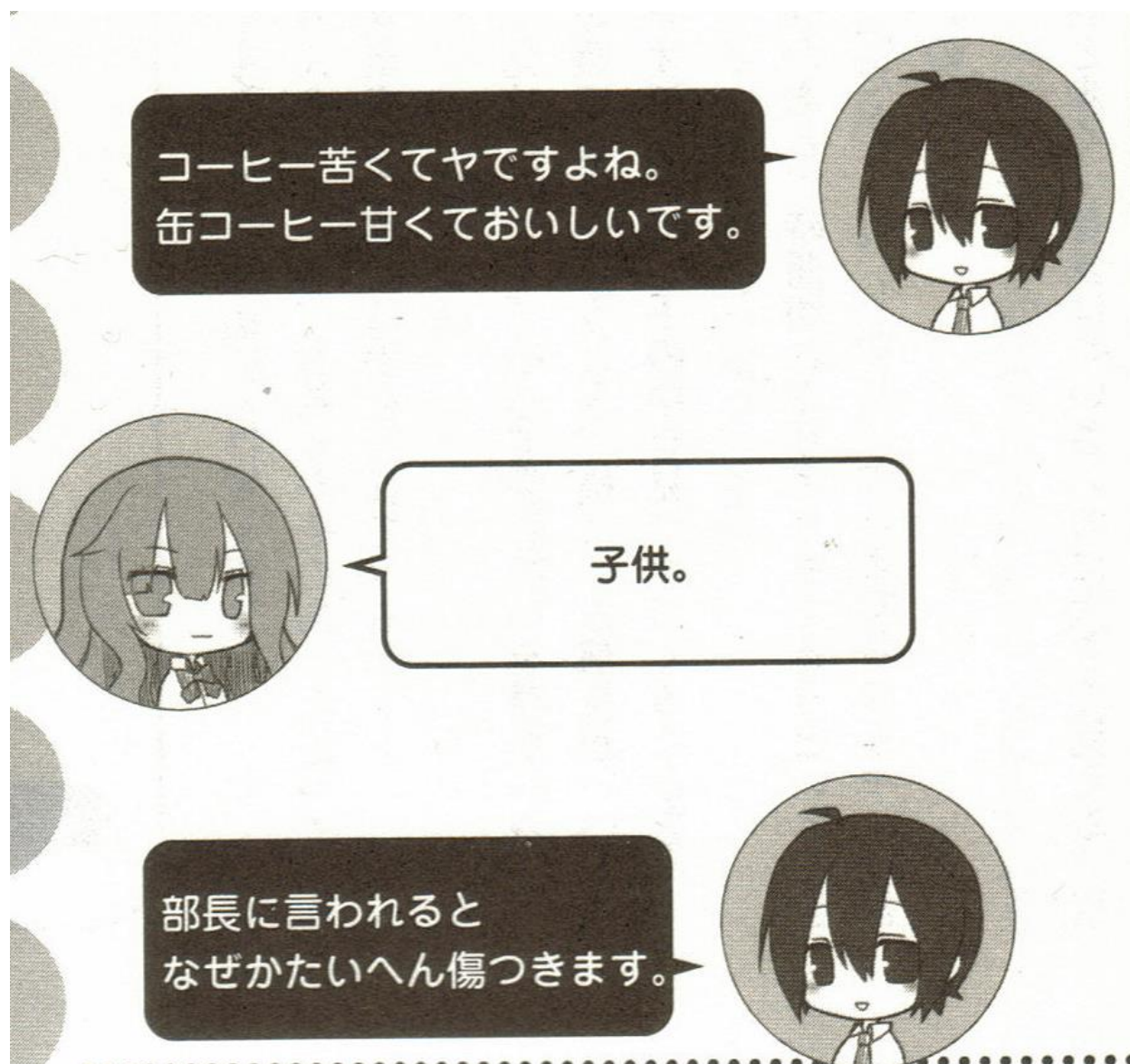
However, he still couldn’t understand the meaning behind Shion’s look.

There was one thing he did understand, though.

He’d thought that the Game Genius was a cool, collected and mature woman, when really she had a lot of flaws too.

Still, Kyouya thought that this side of her might be cute, too.





"I can't stand coffee. It's too bitter. I like canned coffee better since it's sweet."

"You little kid."

"For some reason, it really hurts hearing that from you, president."



Chapter 9: 10 Yen Coin

After making up his mind, Kyouya finally pressed the button on the vending machine.

A PET bottle rolled down, followed by the chiming sound of the change landing.

The amount of time it took for that sound to subside gave him a bad premonition. He tried putting his hand into the change slot.

“Aw, it gave me nothing but ten yen coins.”

He went and showed the coins in his hand to Mao, who’d been waiting for him, showing her a forced smile.

A while ago, Kyouya had noticed that whenever he went to buy something from the vending machine, Mao would come along. Then she’d get into a scarily bad mood and make that same face. He didn’t know why, but for some reason she wouldn’t stop staring at his hand.

Kyouya's own thoughts on it were that perhaps it was because, after putting in the money, he would give himself the small luxury of being indecisive until he almost reached the time limit. However, Mao wasn't such a small person.... well, she was pretty short in stature, but...

"Let's get going."

And so, Mao gallantly walked away, swaggering about. Despite her small stature, she emitted an air of greatness. Kyouya followed her as if lurking in her shadow.

"Oh, I forgot! We need to buy one for Kirara-san too."

Kyouya called out to Mao.

Megumi had some affairs to attend to that day, so she took a day off and didn't come to the club. Therefore, since there wasn't any tea being made, they had nothing to drink.

"Hurry up."

Mao said, slamming her heel on the floor.

"I wonder what I should pick? President, do you know what Kirara-san likes?"

“Meat, right?”

“What kind of drink is that?”

“Fine, meat broth.”

“Alright, I get it. Let’s see... this. Strawberry Milk is fine right?”

“Not that. It costs exactly 100 yen right? If you buy that no change will come out.”

“What does that have to do with anything?”

“Whatever, just buy the long can over there. Not the PET bottle; it costs 150 yen. The long can costs 120 yen, so it’s better to get that.”

“Alright.”

As he was told, Kyouya pressed the button for the long can.

“Ahh! Only 10 yen coins came out again.”

As Kyouya had expected, Mao was trying to peek into his hand.

What was she looking for all this time?

“Do you want something, President?”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean something to drink.”

“A-Ah! R-right...”

Mao took two 100 yen coins from her wallet and bought a canned coffee.

With a chiming sound the change fell.

Mao turned her eyes to the change slot filled with anticipation. After taking the coins, she intently stared at the contents of her hand, but then dropped her shoulders with disappointment.

“Let’s go.”

Her back looked small as she slouched away, matching her stature.

Inside Kyouya's hands rested those 10 yen coins from earlier. He'd thought they were just common 10 yen coins, but on closer inspection, mixed in were two commemorative coins of the 20th year of the Showa era¹ with serrated edges.

That must have been what the president had been staring at with those scary eyes of hers.

"Er..."

Kyouya called Mao's attention.

"Do you want this?"

He put the special coins in his hand and showed them to her.

Mao's face shone brightly.

However, she immediately regained her composure.

¹ Showa era is the period of Japanese history corresponding to the reign of the Showa Emperor, Hirohito, from December 25, 1926, through January 7, 1989.

“I-idiot. I’m the president, you know? There’s no way I can accept these.”

She wanted them, as expected.

“Then let’s make a trade; that would be fine, right? Ah, besides the serrated ones, I have some shiny ones. You’d want them too, right?”

Kyouya took Mao’s hand and opened it. Inside, there were eight common, brown 10 yen coins. One by one he exchanged them for the shiny or serrated ones.

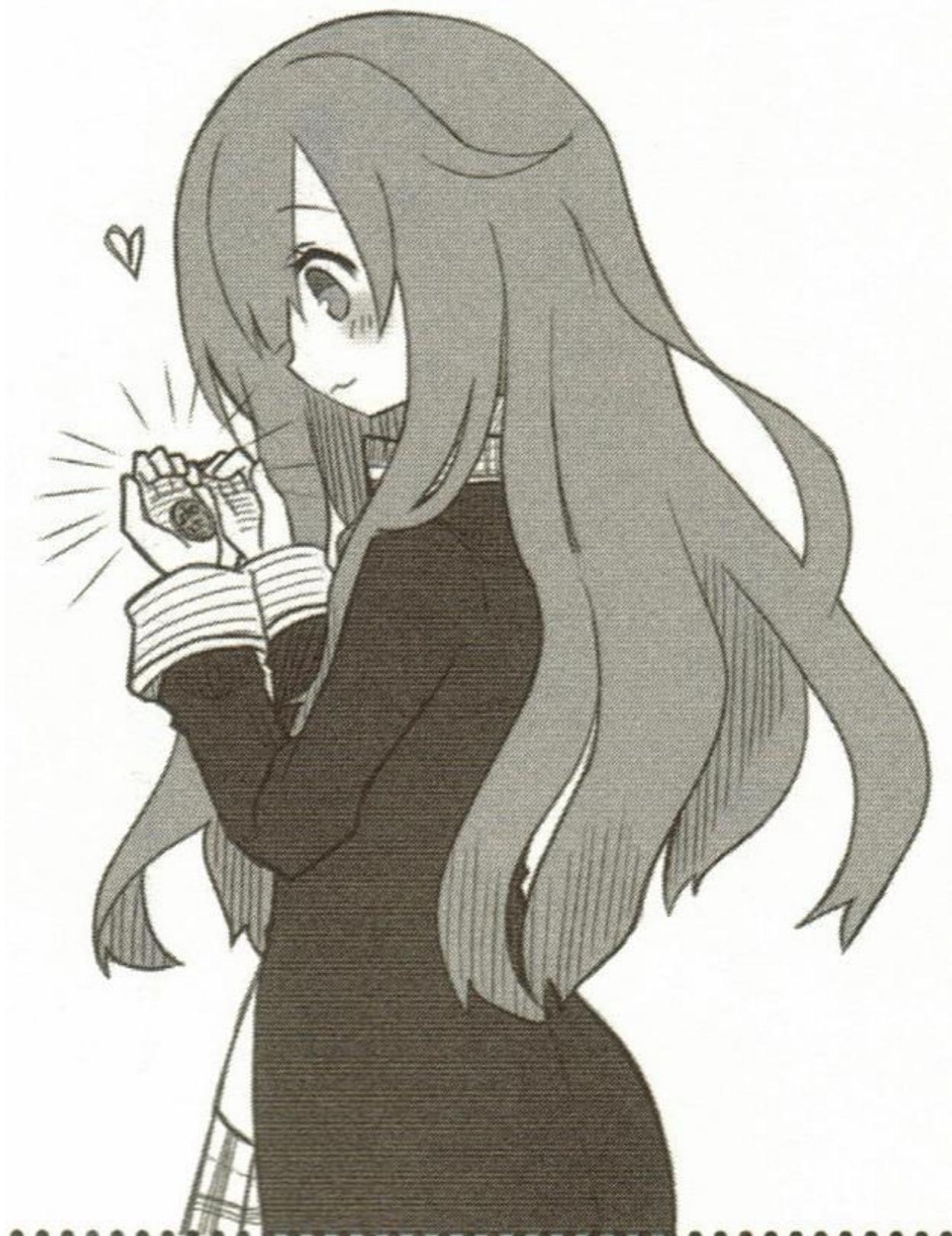
“I-is it okay?”

“It’s fine.”

“E-even if you ask to have them back I won’t give them to you.”

“I won’t ask.”

Kyouya had vowed that he would do anything for that smile.



QUICK FACTS:

The president's treasure box.

Inside it are Mao's private belongings that she keeps in the clubroom.

It holds things like cicadas' cast-off skins, acorns, serrated 10 yen coins, shiny ten yen coins, etc...

All sorts of "treasures" can be found inside.



Chapter 10: Romance Novel – Part 1

“Here you go, milk tea with lots of sugar.”

Megumi gently placed the steaming cup in front of him.

As Kyouya tilted the cup to feel the aroma before tasting it, she brought her face closer to his.

“(This is unusual, isn’t it? Shion-san reading a novel.)”

His eyes turned to the other side of the round table.

The long-haired beauty was reading a paperback novel. As they watched her, she flipped a page.

Oddly, Shion wasn’t playing any games that day.

The book she read was a novel; and a light novel on top of that.

“(That book is yours, isn’t it, Shinomiya-kun?)”

“(Y-yes. That’s right.)”

“(What kind of story is it?)”

“(Err...)”

Talking only in whispers, Megumi held her face way too close to his. Kyouya’s face was red as he explained to her.

It was a story aimed at boys, but it wasn’t a battle story or anything like that; it was a romance. Aside from him, every member of the GJ club was a girl. He had imagined that the girls might read something like this too.

“(That’s why you left it there.)”

Megumi anticipated his explanation with a big nod.

Everybody had brought several of their own personal belongings into the large clubroom, which had originally been a classroom. For example, Megumi had her

tea set and tea leaves collection and Shion had several game boards. Mao's things looked like a collection of rubbish, but she'd get angry if you tried touching them and she'd bite you if you tried throwing them away. They were things like cicadas' cast-off skins or shiny and serrated ten yen coins; a bunch of pretty things she treasured. Kirara kept several animal bones she'd made pure white in a wooden box below the sofa. Who knew whether she kept them as a memorial service to the animals or as treasure?

Kyouya would constantly bring in manga and light novels.

“(You’re quite the devious person, aren’t you, Shinomiya-kun?)”

“(Devious?)”

“(Shion-san fell right into your trap. She looks completely immersed already.)”

“(No, well... trap is kinda...)”

“(Ah, she just went back a page. She’s reading the same part again. I wonder what part has her so interested. She’s already in the palm of your hand, isn’t she? Before the trap that you set for her, even the Game Genius becomes just like my sister after she had her blanket taken away.)”

Megumi wouldn’t hear what he was saying. In this sense, she was just like Mao... like her sister. On top of that, Kyouya couldn’t make sense of that last

comparison. If it was some inside joke of the Amatsuka family, she ought to properly explain it.

“(You said that book was a romance, but just what type of romance is it?)”

“(Eh?)”

Kyouya was at a loss for words at that question.

He’d never thought that there was something like different genres in romance.

“(Well... it’s the type where a boy has an encounter with a girl. In short, the ones they call ‘boy-meets-girl’ in English.)”

“Then the part that got Shion-san so immersed must be the girl-meets-boy part.”

Getting agitated over something, Megumi completely forgot to keep her voice low. She spoke with her normal voice.

Shion, who’d been concentrating on the book, noticed it, as expected.

“Cough.”

She cleared her throat.

“Okay, understood Shinomiya-kun. Next is lemon tea, right? Maybe I’ll try blending nilgiri¹ in.”

Megumi swiftly took her leave.

How unfair.

Left alone, Kyouya timidly turned to face Shion.

Then he saw something unexpected.

Shion faced the opposite way. Her earlobe that poked out through her long hair was deep red.

“I’m already done reading this so...”

She slid the book on top of the table, never letting her face meet Kyouya’s.

¹ A strong black tea produced in India (Source: Wikipedia).

He doubted it.

That was a lie. The part she kept going back and forth through, just then, was still at the beginning of the book.

The part where the boy and the girl meet each other. The boy-meets-girl part.

“If you’d like I could lend it to you.”

“No, I’m done reading it already.”

“I’d be happy if you took it home and read it at your leisure. After all, this is from my personal selection of recommended books.”

“Y-yes, I understand. The book that was left here was one you’d already read. This item you went to the trouble of bringing here is your recommended selection. Logically, I am obliged to go along with this turn of events.”

The game expert discreetly pulled the book resting on the table into her hands, tightly holding it against her lap.

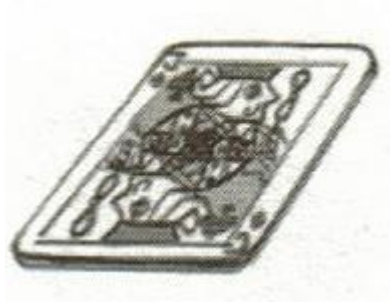
In the end, Shion was...

For the several hours remaining until the end of school, she preciously held that book on her lap.





Sign: "Continuation"



Chapter 11: Romance Novel – Part 2

“Thank you for letting me read this.”

Shion said as she handed Kyouya the book.

Lunch break, the same as always. The same room as always. A pleasant breeze flew in from the opened window. The smell of fresh leaves filled the room.

The book was the light novel he had lent her. The other day in the clubroom she had made it half-way through. Though acting as if she’d been forced into it, as soon as she had finished reading it she had brought the book back with her.

“Er, well... was it interesting?”

“Yes, it was.”

Shion replied halfheartedly.

“I... I really like it. I’d never read much romance before, but this book was so interesting I even got the second volume.”

Kyouya said, his eyes looking upwards.

For a girl, Shion was quite tall. Naturally, you’d end up having to look up to talk to her.

“Oh, I see.”

Once again she gave a halfhearted reply. The mood was not very inviting of conversation.

“Look, my family name is Shinomiya, right? The author of this book is called Ninomiya Shuuji. I thought maybe we had some affinity, so I bought it on a whim, but then I ended up getting into it...”

Kyouya was aware that all of that trivial conversation he was making had no point or meaning.

It’s a common thing for the person you lend a book to to have different tastes than you.

Sometimes you'll think something is interesting, and somebody else will think it's not interesting at all. That happens all the time.

"Ah! No, it's not that. I was just thinking..."

Shion said abruptly.

She looked directly at Kyouya's eyes.

"There were parts I didn't quite understand. I was wondering how I could ask you about it."

"Which parts?"

Looking up, Kyouya asked.

"What exactly didn't you understand? Any part in particular?"

"For example... pass it to me... here."

Shion took the book and immediately started flipping the pages. In just one go, without flipping back even once, she decided on a page right in the middle of the book.

“For example, this scene. The girl is talking to the teddy bear about her feelings, and then she tells it she loves the boy.”

“Teddy bear probably refers to a bear plush toy... I wasn’t really paying attention to that when I was reading.”

“I know that.”

“Er, then... She’s talking to it because she can’t ask anybody about this.”

“I know that too. Even I sometimes talk to the jack cards. Spades is very cynical and diamonds has a sharp tongue.”

“Well, then...”

Kyouya wrung his neck. Was there anything else not to understand?

“Here, this. This part.”

Shion pointed to a sentence.

There was just one place she could be pointing to; the part where the female heroine realizes her feelings and tells her favorite stuffed toy that she has just realized she's in love with the protagonist.

"But, this part..."

"That's right. I can't understand these feelings like love. What does it feel like to like another person?"

"Why is that?"

"I've never been in love."

Shion said, as if it were somebody else's affair.

After sinking in her thoughts for a moment, Shion started to talk as if speaking to herself.

"Not only love, but joy, anger, sadness, amusement... I can't understand any of them right. No matter what I do, I always carry this feeling of detachment. It's as if this isn't real. For me, the time when I'm playing games is the only reality."

The girl stopped her monologue after noticing Kyouya's expression.

“Maybe that was a bit too difficult.”

Kyouya had a vague expression. He'd honestly found the talk difficult to follow, but he understood that Shion had opened herself up over something that you wouldn't talk about with anybody but a close friend.

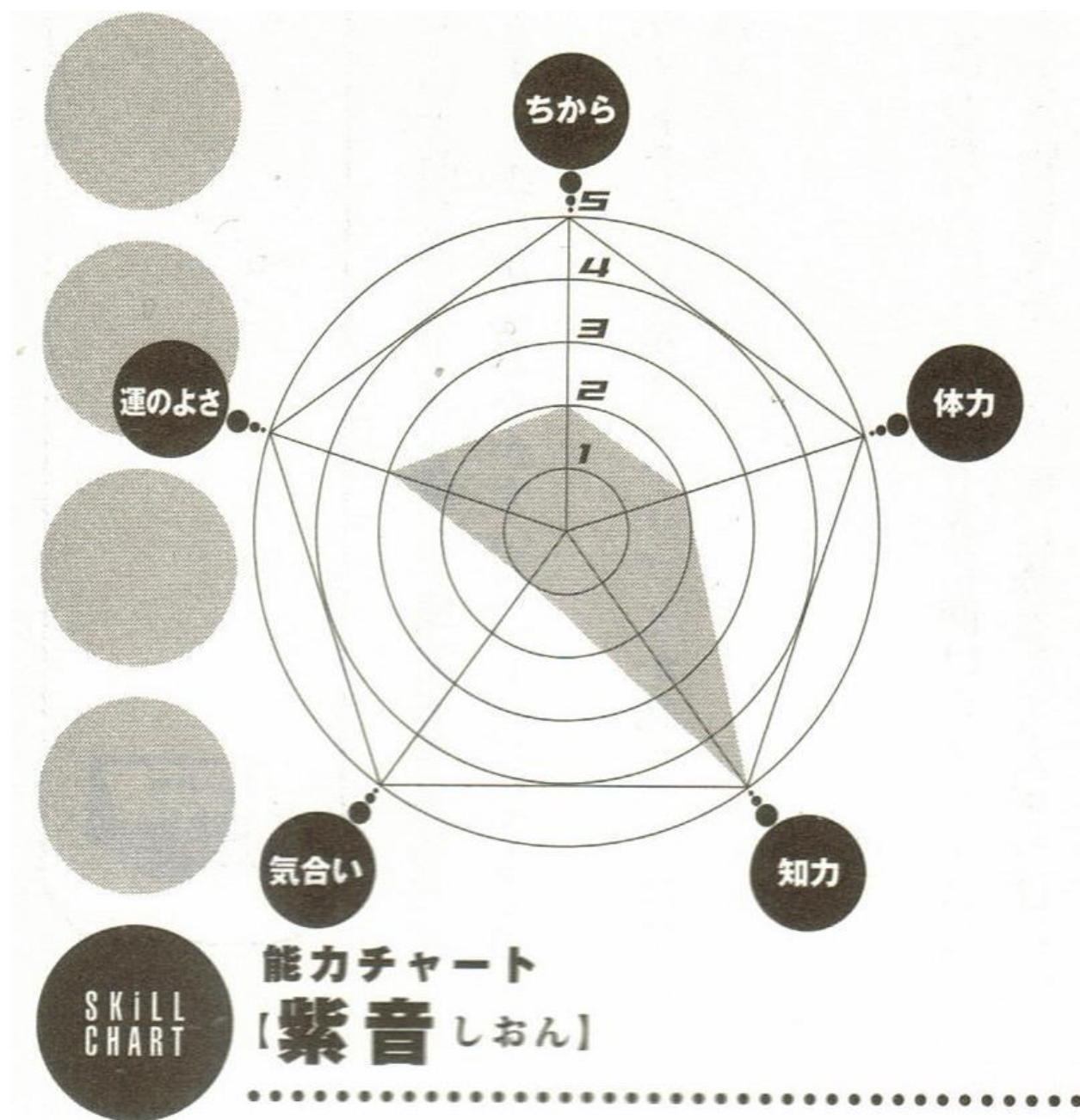
Shion continued to be immersed in her thoughts, but after a while she gave one big nod.

“Yes, I got it. So that's why I'm in this club. I've just realized it.”

Kyouya now found himself immersed in thought, trying to figure out what Shion had just realized, but in the end, he didn't understand a thing.

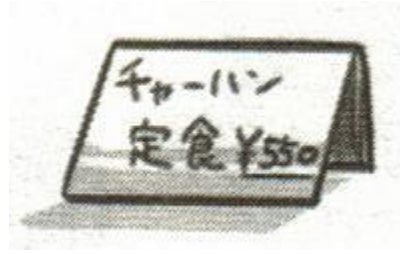
That's why he was satisfied just seeing the smile on the girl's face.



**SKILL CHART: Shion**

Clockwise starting from the top:

- Power: 2
- Constitution: 2
- Intelligence: 5
- Fighting spirit: 1
- Luck: 3



Fried Rice Set Meal ¥550

Chapter 12: The Rules of Set Meals¹

On the path to the station from school, there was a ramen shop that didn't look too popular.

Having idly chatted in the clubroom till the announcement proclaimed that everyone had to go home, if somebody said "I'm hungry" on their way back, they'd all end up going there.

It was usually Kirara, though she'd always continue to eat her fried chicken, spare ribs or whatever regardless.

"Sup, pops! Let's eat on the tatami seats?"

Mao stepped in as if it was her own house.

¹ In Japan, a set meal (teishoku) is a common convention for meals that consists of a main dish and a side dish, always accompanied by rice and miso soup.

The table over the tatami seats was filled with things. It didn't look like it was set there for customers at all.

Mao swept the table clean with her elbow, roughly clearing it of needless things and carelessly throwing them onto the floor. Apparently, she had known the owner since she was a little kid.

“Wow, sonny, you're surrounded by beauties. Wanna trade places with this old man?”

The old man made a strange hand sign.

Kyouya only fixedly cast his eyes down. He was surrounded by Mao, Megumi, Shion and Kirara, 4 beautiful girls. He had absolutely no objections on that part; he only wished the man would stop making that obscene sign in front of him with his thumb.²

Megumi didn't understand what it meant, so she just looked on in puzzlement. Shion turned her face slightly to the side and stared at the framed celebrity signatures hanging on the wall. Mao sported a wide grin. As for Kirara, she didn't seem to show any reaction.

² The man is probably making the fig sign, which is considered obscene in Japan.

The girl had her eyes fixed on an old, stained menu that looked as if it hadn't been replaced in ten years, until Mao took it from her hands.

"Let's all order accordingly then. That way we can split the portions."

And so it was decided that they'd all order accordingly.

The first to open her mouth was Mao.

"Pops! First, we'll have the fried rice set meal with a large serving of rice."

"Right away!"

Kyouya had his mouth half open with a "Huh?"

What's a fried rice set meal?

He'd never heard of it before. Surely it must be something like a ramen and fried rice set. He tried to assure himself. But if that was the case, what did she mean with a large serving of rice? Why was there rice?

After the wait, the real thing came out.

“There you go! Fried rice set meal with a large serving of rice!”

He put the fried rice on the table and, beside it, a bowl with a mountain of white rice. It really was a fried rice set meal. Not just a set meal with fried rice, but an honest to God fried rice set meal.

Kyouya turned his face to the side and gazed sideways at the fried rice. It was ordinary fried rice; regardless of the angle or how you looked at it... it was fried rice... nothing else.

“Let’s dig in!”

“Eating living beings. Show gratitude.”

“Oh, God in heaven that grants us life...”

After each of them made their own sort of thanks, they split the food and started to eat.

The mountain of fried rice that Kyouya was watching from the corners of his eyes was steadily cut down. Without saying a word, as if it were perfectly normal, everybody ate their fried rice with white rice on the side.

“You’re not eating, Shinomiya-kun?”

“Hey, Kyoro, if you don’t eat it it’s going to be gone before you know it.”

Having been told that by Megumi and Mao, Kyouya split his disposable chopsticks.

The fried rice really was genuine fried rice. He tried taking just the fried rice, without the side dish, but Mao got mad at him and Megumi kindly warned him that he should eat the white rice too.

Kyouya went quiet, and after serving himself some of the side dish he ate the white rice too.

“Pops! Next is a yakisoba³ set meal with a large serving of rice!”

Another order came from Mao.

What came next was a large portion of yakisoba with another mountain of rice. Kyouya observed it out of the corners of his eyes again. As expected, no matter how he looked at it, it was simply yakisoba.

³ Japanese noodles fried with assorted vegetables and meats.

To Kyouya's eyes, as they went, these "set-meals" should not have existed. It was akin to the "Okonomiaki set meal" that they said Kansai people ate.

The mountain of yakisoba gradually disappeared.

What kind of strange order would come next? Kyouya expected to see something scary.

"Pops! Next is a gyoza⁴ set meal. With extra rice."

The gyoza set meal came out. It was served in portions for two.

"This isn't normal at all!"

Kyouya shouted abruptly, unable to keep it inside any further.

"What are you getting so mad about?"

"I'm not mad!"

⁴ A type of dumpling filled with meat and vegetables

Thinking that nobody there would understand his plea, Kyouya silently went back to eating.

Everybody was already starting to eat their gyoza set meal, but Kyouya's plate still had plenty of fried rice left.



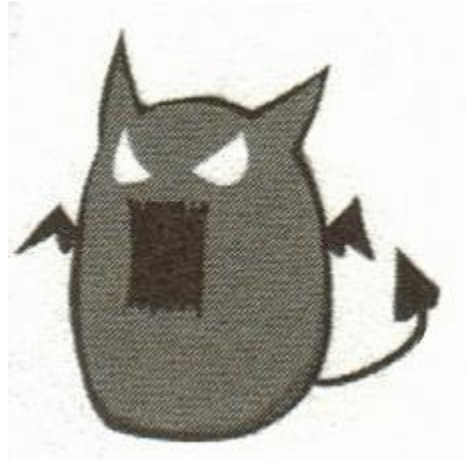
Fried Rice Set Meal (Secret Menu)

¥550 (Tax Included)



“Do they have a white rice set meal in that shop too?”

“Are you an idiot?”



Chapter 13: Biting Danger

Kyouya had noticed for a while now

Every now and then Mao would shift her eyes to him.

Feeling uncomfortable about those looks, he hid his right arm close to his body.

He let his book rest on the table, holding down the pages with his left hand, bringing the teacup to his mouth; he made sure to do everything with his left hand.

As he tried to act nonchalant about it, Mao suddenly spoke while facing the other way.

“I’m sorry.”

“Ah, don’t worry. It’s fine.”

Kyouya kept his right arm restrained.

“It’s not fine. It’s even making a crust.”

“Eh? Well...”

There was a semicircular wound located where Mao was looking. It was Mao’s bite mark.

Not wanting to make a big deal out of it, Kyouya hadn’t put any bandages on the wound, but now it seemed as if it was drawing even more attention.

He had been bitten the day before. He was usually bitten once every three days, but this was the first time the bite had been strong enough to draw blood and leave a scar.

“It’s your own fault for acting like you deserve to be bitten.”

“Er... okay, I’ll reflect on that.”

What had he done the day before? Kyouya tried to remember.

He had rested his hand on Mao's head, and then the bite came. He couldn't remember the context, but that had been the immediate cause.

Why would she get angry over just that!? He couldn't understand. Still, the idea that he'd been at fault, that he should be reflecting on this alone... that much he understood.

"More importantly, you could have just said it. If you'd told me that it hurt I would have stopped."

He did! He did! He'd said that! As those outstanding canines tortured him, he'd been tapping the floor in rendition.

"Okay, next time, I'll keep that in mind."

"I already said sorry!"

Mao said, raising herself from the chair, causing her her fluffy long hair to stretch out in a messy way.

"No, I mean it. I seriously don't mind, so please stop worrying about it, president."

“R-really? I guess you’re right. Yeah. Let’s do that, no more worries. I won’t worry, so stop worrying about it already... got it?”

“Understood.”

“That’s what I’ve been trying to tell you from the start.” Holding back those words in his chest, Kyouya showed an admirable face as he nodded.

Mao took a few sips from the tea cup she held with both hands. Her face had become a little brighter than a moment before.

“Alright, it’s settled; I won’t bite you anymore today.”

She muttered to herself. Kyouya chose not to question how come it was just for that day.

Now that Mao had finally settled down, Kyouya could breathe a sigh of relief.

He suddenly remembered the day when he’d first come to the GJ club.

Or you could say he was captured into the club.

At the time, there were still cherry blossom petals on the trees.

Searching for a club to join, Kyouya had walked into the former school building to visit the culture club. There, he passed in front of a room with no identification but a sign saying “GJ club”. While hesitating on whether or not to enter the room, he ended up being forcibly taken inside.

Apparently, taking people who were wandering carelessly in front of the room, capturing and then inspecting them was a tradition in this club. They would then make them club members without giving them a chance to get away.

“What kind of club is this?”

Kyouya muttered without thinking.

“What’s up with you, grinning like that? You’re giving me the creeps.”

“Well, it’s just...”

“Just what? Just say it, you’re creeping me out.”

“I was thinking about the day when I first came here.”

“Oh, you mean when we put you in a bag and captured you? Just let that be. Honestly, you... ah...”

She was apparently enjoying talking to him, when suddenly, her face changed colors and she shut her mouth.

After a second she spoke again, looking uncomfortable.

“That time... I bit you too, huh?”

“President, we promised that we wouldn’t speak about that.”

“Hey, did you think I was... a violent person? What was your first impression of me?”

“My first impression?”

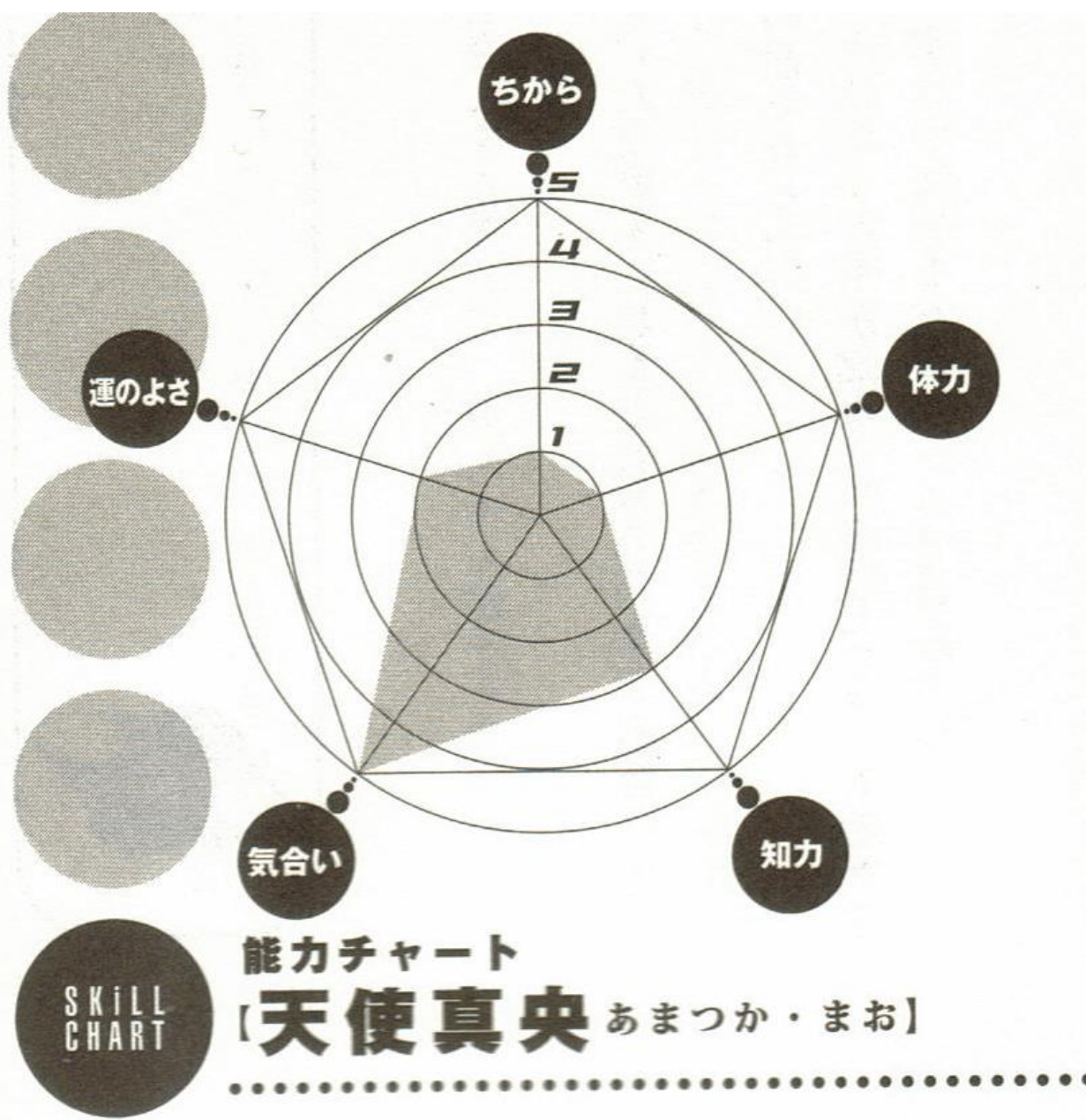
Kyouya folded his arms and started to ponder. He soon found the answer.

“I thought you were an elementary schooler.”

“Gaah!”

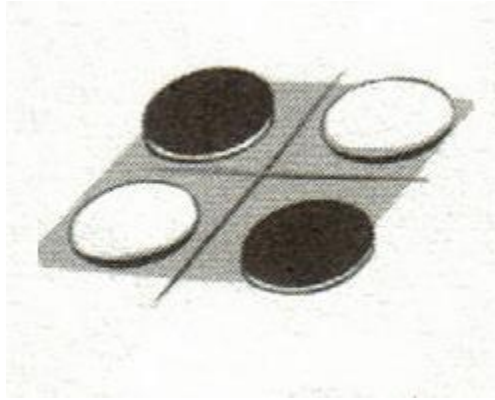
He was bitten. Why!? She had even promised that she wouldn’t bite him anymore that day.



**SKILL CHART: Amatsuka Mao**

Clockwise starting from the top:

- Power: 1
- Constitution: 1
- Intelligence: 3
- Fighting spirit: 5
- Luck: 2



Chapter 14: It's a Challenge! – Part 1

"I challenge you!"

Megumi said, holding an othello board in one hand, pointing to Shion with the other.

"Very well, let's begin."

The game genius had no objections. Putting a bookmark on the paperback she was reading, she accepted the challenge.

The ones who were dumbfounded were Kyouya and the others.

Mao let her mouth drop open absentmindedly. The pocky she held in her mouth fell down. Kirara too, asking "A combat?" dragged a chair closer to the round table.

Kyouya was flustered.

“Megumi-chan, you’re being reckless.”

The two were already facing each other competitively. Assuming her side on the table, Megumi whispered to Kyouya.

“It’s okay. Leave it to me. I’ve got a chance of winning.”

She asserted.

Tightly pulling together her chubby eyebrows, she put on an unusually determined face on.

“No, look, Shion-san is a genius in games.”

Kyouya kept insisting.

In the GJ club, there wasn’t a human capable of competing in games with Shion. No matter what game, no one had a single chance.

“A genius is a genius precisely because he is an insurmountable wall. If something somehow ends up defeating him, you can’t say he’s a genius anymore.”

“Don’t talk about what you don’t understand, just give up. Megu hates losing. The other day we were playing cat’s cradle and she wouldn’t let me stop until we did it all the way. She’s just stubborn; she won’t even hear what you’re saying.”

“But... why othello?”

If she had picked a game that relied a bit more on luck she might even have gotten a chance. At blackjack, for example, even Shion might lose.

“But in Othello, you can aim for a complete turnaround in a single move, right?”

Megumi cheerfully said.

It was useless. Kyouya decided he’d have to watch her back.

“Which should I pick?”

Shion took one black and white piece and threw it like a coin toss. She hid the piece in her hand and asked Megumi to guess.

“Black.”

Having gotten the color right, Megumi was given the first move. The game had begun.

The beginnings proceeded smoothly.

Both sides placed the pieces leaving almost no time to think. Only when a piece was turned did the game pause for a second.

However, midway through the game, Megumi's hand stopped. She started to look as if she was pondering.

"Oh, that's unexpected."

Mao said while munching down her pocky.

The major expectation was that the game would be settled midway through, but countering those expectations, Megumi was putting up a brave fight.

As the end of the game approached, Megumi's black pieces were still almost half of the total.

It was a close contest.

“Shii, are you going easy on her?”

“No, I wouldn’t do such a rude thing. I’m giving it my best, of course.”

Shion answered under Mao’s firm stare.

However, to Kyouya it looked like the black and white pieces were numbered almost equally. If Shion wasn’t going easy on Megumi, then just what was going on?

The board’s surface was almost entirely filled with pieces. Only a few spots remained for placing them.

“Ah!”

Megumi suddenly said. Her eyebrows knit together and with a serious face she placed a piece on the board. Even though several of Shion’s pieces got turned over, she looked regretful.

“Ooh, I see.”

Mao said.

“Tasty?”

Kirara said something too.

“What happened?”

Kyouya was the only one who didn’t understand.

“Just look.”

When Shion placed the last piece at the last spot, even Kyouya understood.

Every black piece flipped sides at once. The whole board turned to white. The 8×8 grid had become completely one colored. It was a perfect victory.

“Wow, that was pretty difficult.”

Shion said. Winning or losing had never been her concern. What she was aiming for was a perfect victory. Indeed, she was a game genius.

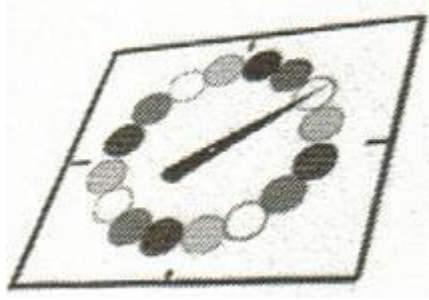
“A complete defeat.”

As Megumi recognized her defeat, her angelic smile returned to her face.





Sign: "Continuation"



Chapter 15: It's a Challenge! – Part 2

“I challenge you!”

Megumi said.

The last time she had been holding an Othello board in her hand. Today, it was a colorful vinyl mat with blue, red, green and yellow circles drawn on it.

“Very well, let’s begin.”

The game genius had no objections. Shion placed a bookmark on the paperback she was reading.

“But what game is that?”

At Shion’s question, Megumi puffed up her chest with pride and answered.

“It’s called twister.”

“Another dangerous game?”

“Is this game dangerous?”

“Megu. Shii. Combat?”

The third party, consisting of Mao, Kyouya and Kirara, followed them to the corner of the room.

Megumi spread out the vinyl mat on the floor. It was about as big as a blanket.

On the mat, several columns of colored circles were drawn. It seemed the circles were 4 different colors.

Suddenly, another prop came into play.

Megumi placed a small roulette on top of the mat. Below the roulette needle there were marks for the four different colors on the mat and for hands and feet.

“In this game you have to place your hands and feet according to what comes out on the roulette. Right hand, red. For example. You alternate turns doing that and the first one to fall down is the loser.”

Mao explained the rules for them. Somehow, the rules were really simple. She was done in an instant.

“Why is that dangerous?”

“Watch and you’ll see.”

“I feel that I can win in this game! I have confidence in my flexibility!”

Megumi took off her shoes, stood with her socks on the mat and started stretching.

She was seriously aiming for the win. Indeed, the girl was quite the sore loser.

“I’m ready whenever you are.”

The opposing genius of games had the same natural stance as always. She didn’t even know the name of the game, so this was certainly her first time playing it. To be able to remain relaxed like that, she had to have the confidence of a king.

“Well then, shall we start from Megu? Right foot, yellow.”

Mao spun the roulette and announced the result.

“Okay.”

The game had started. Initially, it went by with no surprises.

At first the two stood up while stepping on the colored circles, and then they had to crouch down to touch them with their hands.

But then, after the tenth spin of the roulette or so, the circumstances changed.

For example, Megumi had her right hand on red, her left hand on green, her right foot on green too and she had to put her left foot on blue. Of course, she was no longer standing up, but on all fours. Furthermore, she was stretching over her opponent's body. As for Shion, perhaps the roulette was favoring her, but she was in a pretty comfortable pose.

“Uh, uwa...”

Something that shouldn't be seen was caught by Kyouya's eyes. He became flustered and jumped to the side.

The skirts on their school were pretty short. When Megumi assumed an awkward and difficult pose, from Kyouya's position, being right behind her...

"T-that's why I said it was dangerous! Look at that girl, she's completely unaware there's a boy watching."

Mao said with a blushing face.

Kyouya awkwardly agreed.

The roulette of destiny kept on spinning.

"Hnng... I w-won't lose."

Megumi's pose was becoming more and more difficult. Even a member from the rhythmic gymnastics club would have a hard time with that horrible stance.

The opposing genius of games had her hands and feet on the floor in quite a casual manner. It didn't look difficult at all. She was completely in control, as if she knew the results of the roulette ahead of time.

"No matter the game, if it has rules, then there is a method for increasing the probability of victory. I simply put that into practice. For example, in this game, If

you calculate statistically the colors that should come next, and assume the pose that will increase your probability of success, you should be fine.”

The genius of games said without breaking a sweat. She moved her hands and feet unconcerned, changing her pose.

Her opponent, Megumi, was giving her best, but it seemed as if she had suddenly run into a dead end. There was no way for her.

“For example, at this situation, if you calculate the winning pose...”

Shion’s smooth movements suddenly became jerky.

“The winning pose in this case is... the winning pose is... No, such an embarrassing... It’s impossible.”

Shion blurted out in a quiet voice, turning red up to the ears.

She assumed a pose different from the one she initially intended it appeared. Whatever embarrassing pose that was, in the end nobody saw it. As the roulette spun a few more times, her condition became more and more unsustainable. The situation had completely turned around. Finally, Shion fell down abruptly.

“Uff!”

Having defeated the genius of games, Megumi made a victory sign with her fingers.





SKILL CHART: Amatsuka Megumi

Clockwise starting from the top:

- Power: 2
- Constitution: 3
- Intelligence: 3
- Fighting spirit: 3
- Luck: 4



Chapter 16: Jigsaw Puzzle

In the same room as always; at the same round table as always.

But today the setting was a bit different.

Countless pieces were scattered on top of the stump-like table.

“Hmm... This one doesn’t go here either I guess.”

Megumi said with a serious face. Frowning with her chubby eyebrows, she pushed the jigsaw puzzle pieces together, but they didn’t fit at all.

“Jeez, don’t stand there watching, Shinomiya-kun. Give me a hand.”

“Eh? Ah? Is it okay?”

Having been told that, he stopped resting his chin on his hand. He had assumed this was a game you enjoyed individually.

“Of course. Let’s all do it together.”

At Megumi’s invitation, the remaining three joined in too. Shion, Kirara and Mao, the whole club set out to solve the puzzle.

At the box, it said there were 500 pieces. It was quite an epic puzzle.

“We start by putting together the outermost pieces. Look, the most straightforward ones are these. They definitely go somewhere along the sides.”

Megumi said, putting another piece in.

The border was almost done.

“I see, this is actually my first time doing this.”

Shion said as she took a piece in her hand.

Then, for some reason, she started staring at the jigsaw puzzle’s casing.

For several seconds she gazed at the drawing on the box.

“Like this, right?”

Suddenly, right in the center of the frame they’d set up, with nothing around it, Shion placed down the piece.

“This one goes here, this one here.”

One by one, Shion placed down the pieces at places that didn’t connect to the rest at all. Completely isolated from each other, the pieces were quickly filling up the space. Every now and then a link would form and one could see that, indeed, the pieces were where they were supposed to be.

“Shion-san, that’s amazing.”

Megumi raised her voice. Kyouya was at a loss for words.

“Puzzles are a kind of game too, after all.”

The genius of games said nonchalantly.

“By the way, er... Kirara, what are you doing?”

Back to his senses, Kyouya directed the question at Kirara.

If one were to ask what the girl was doing while everyone else was normally, or prodigiously, putting the pieces together...

She was smelling the pieces. One by one, she'd bring her face close and sniff them.

How could you explain to this wild girl what a jigsaw puzzle was? Kyouya was pondering on the problem when...

"This and this."

Suddenly, Kirara put two pieces together.

"This and this. Smell. Same."

And so, the assault began.

Shion placing them one by one and Kirara combining them in pairs, their speeds were exactly the same, with almost instant movement.

The puzzle was quickly coming together with an incredible momentum. Kyouya, who was now just watching without even putting his hands out, took a glimpse to the side.

There stood a silent, motionless person.

Mao had her arms crossed.

She stared at the jigsaw puzzle, her eyes filled with vigor.

Just a little bit, Kyouya was looking forward to see what she would do.

The two upperclassmen were solving the puzzle with their ludicrous method.

In that case, Mao would definitely show them an even more incredible solution. An even more creative one.

“That’s enough! Aah! Jeez! What the hell are you doing?”

Mao screamed, unlocking her arms.

“All this time, this piece here, this piece there, this piece here, this piece there...”

She made a sudden movement.

Like a pianist about to start a performance, she raised both her hands up high.

“Hyaaaah!”

All of the pieces were turned upside down simultaneously, scattering themselves about.

“Let’s see you put the together now.”

Mao had been original, but it wasn’t a solution at all.

“With us playing like this, it’ll be an endless game.”

Megumi said with a calm face.

“You only have to buy it once but you can play with it forever. Isn’t that great?”

That way of playing was definitely not in the manual, Kyouya thought.



"I tried to make a jigsaw puzzle with cookies."

QUICK FACTS:

The Amatsuka Sisters

The big sister-like, tolerant little sister, Amatsuka Megumi, and the extremely selfish, little sister-like character, the big sister, Amatsuka Mao.

Just by looking at them, one can tell that they're amusingly uneven sisters.

Their name is written as 天使 and read as Amatsuka.¹

¹ They would be read as tenshi (angel) in everyday usage, but when giving someone a name in Japan you don't necessarily have to use the established reading of a Kanji. Amatsuka seems to be an unusual reading for those Kanji even for naming purposes though.



Chapter 17: Where Do You Start Washing From?

Where Do You Start Washing From?

“When taking a bath...”

Mao suddenly said.

Having a conversation being started abruptly, and out of context, was not something unusual in the club. That’s why Kyouya just listened to her without even lifting his eyes from his manga.

“...usually, where do you start washing from?”

“The head, I guess.”

Shion was the first to answer.

“First of all, the hair.”

“Oh, that part must be troublesome for you.”

Mao said, gazing at Shion’s long glossy hair.

Shion’s hair grew past her hips all the way down to her knees. When she sat on a chair, it looked as if it would sweep the floor.

“Though the president doesn’t lose when it comes to length, right?”

Kyouya boldly jumped into the girl talk. He felt like an outsider just listening in.

“My hair is a lost cause. It’s curly, so it gets tangled up easily.”

“Actually, I think that your type of hair is the ideal one. Soft and feminine. Well the grass is always greener on the other side, or so they say.”

Kyouya tried to imagine a Shion with fluffy hair and the appearance of an elementary schooler.

It was impossible.

“On days when I don’t wash my hair... I start from the left arm I guess, then the right arm. I think washing from top to bottom is the most efficient way so that no dirt will stick to places you’ve already washed. I’ve never investigated this matter though.”

“Who cares about efficiency? That’s dull.”

“I have a question. Are there really days when you don’t wash your hair?”

Mao had put it off as dull, but Kyouya had found that a surprising fact.

“Are you an idiot? Washing your hair everyday would be a pain. It takes an hour to dry it off with a dryer. If you let it dry naturally, it takes five hours! Ah! That’s it, it’s decided. Kyoro, from today on you’re not allowed to cut your hair. In two years, you’ll have a fabulous long hair. Then you’ll understand a girl’s feelings.”

“No way, it wouldn’t look good on me.”

“If you don’t want long hair, then let’s shave it. We’ll make your head all smooth.”

“Why does it have to be so extreme?”

“Because it’s amusing of course.”

“Er... as for me...”

Megumi cut into the flow of the conversation, raising her hand.

“First I’ll wash Mao’s head...”

“You don’t wash it yourself?”

“You’re pesky, aren’t you? Properly washing something this long by yourself is a pain.”

“Then cut it. Let’s shave it off.”

“Sure, let’s cut it. You wanna try it? You’ll assume the responsibility when I’m bald, right?”

“What responsibility? You’ll willingly cut it yourself, right?”

“Er... as for me...”

Megumi cut into the flow of the conversation again. This time she started talking without waiting for their attention.

“Let’s see... I usually start with the boobs, with the body mitten, like this...”

“Don’t! You... what are you doing?”

Mao asked widening her eyes.

“Stop talking about booo... eh... ah... kyah! T-that’s not it! Er... err... I mean the armpits and its peripheries...”

Kyouya couldn’t help but stare intently. Unconsciously, his imagination started to work... a nosebleed was imminent.

An uncomfortable silence set in.

Clearing her throat, Mao lifted the silence.

“So, Kirara, where do you start washing from?”

“Legs?”

Kirara said, tilting her head. When talking, the girl would generally speak as if she was making a question.

“Legs, huh? Good, safe.”

“What do you mean safe?”

“You don’t ask any further. Don’t ask dense questions. Don’t ask specific questions. I’ll bite you.”

He got warned, as if she were somehow anticipating something already.

Kyouya couldn’t enjoy himself, even though it was Mao who had originally started the conversation.

“Then where do you start washing from, president?”

“M-me? Well, I...”

He felt like he’d gotten the better off of the flustered Mao, but it was only for a moment.

“Me? Well, in my case, I start by washing my hands.”

“That’s not fair.”

Having said that, he was bitten. With a chomp he was done for.



"I'm turning on the water..."

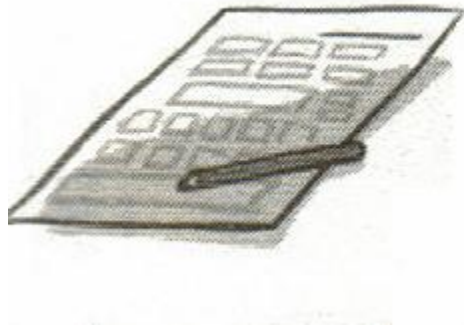
"The shampoo got into my eye!"

CHARACTER PROFILE:

Amatsuka Megumi – Part 2

Hobbies: Tea, Knitting

Subject she's best at: History



Chapter 18: Midterm Tests

The first semester's midterm tests were approaching.

The atmosphere in the GJ club had changed. With textbooks and notes spread everywhere, it had become a study room.

"Ah, jeez. It would be great if there weren't any tests."

Mao muttered while diligently writing down an English translation. She tightly held her mechanical pencil with an unusual grip, writing in strange sinuous letters. At the same time, her hair also flowed sinuously on top of the table.

"You don't like tests, president?"

Kyouya asked while grinding his way through factorizations.

“Just look at me. Do I look like someone who likes studying?”

“I really like them, though. Tests and stuff.”

“That part of you is really detestable, you know? You ask a person a question just so you can talk about yourself?”

“In something like a foot race, even if I give it my all, no matter what I do I can’t beat someone with better reflexes. But when it comes to studying, if I dedicate myself, my rank will rise.”

It was his first test since entering high school. His spirit was fired up.

“That’s right, in our school...”

Megumi joined in the conversation too.

“...they put announcements such as rankings in the corridor, but it looks like that’s very unusual.”

Megumi’s weak point in school was physics, and she was particularly diligent about it. Contrary to what one would expect, she was a very sore loser; it came as no surprise that she had the same opinion as Kyouya on tests.

“The hierarchy¹ is decided on the first midterm examinations after all.”

Shion affirmed.

They didn’t understand that expression very well though.

“...hierarchy is... the structure in... the ranking... social ranking?”

Carefully referencing to a dictionary, Kirara translated Shion’s unintelligible term to them.

For some reason, after she finished her translation, Kirara kept referring to the dictionary all the time.

“Are you going to be alright not studying at all, Shion-san?”

Kyouya asked Shion, who was the only one in the room not studying.

“Huh? But I am studying. Fiction teaches us good lessons about life.”

¹ Shion says hierarchy in English here, hence the other characters’ confusion.

The girl said with a paperback book in hand.

“No, I’m talking about studying for the tests.”

“Ah, that’s what you meant. I always think of it this way, isn’t the purpose of the institution known as exams supposed to be measuring precisely your normal abilities? The act of studying will then end up distorting the observation of your usual knowledge.”

At Shion’s words, Mao snorted with her nose.

“So you’re going to get into college without studying, huh? You’re getting into Tokyo University, huh?”

“Well, that’s my intention.”

Shion plainly replied.

She didn’t seem to realize that Mao was both mocking and provoking her.

“ ... ”

At that, Mao sunk in silence.

Amidst that silence, Kyouya had the definite impression he could hear Mao saying “gyafun”². He thought he was hearing things.

Measuring a genius against an ordinary person had been a mistake in the first place.

“Gyafun. ...means. ...there’s nothing.”

It seemed as if Kirara had heard it too. It wasn’t just his imagination.

“That’s a problem. If Shion-san is a person who doesn’t study, there’s no one to teach me.”

“I was wondering why the hell you had your notes spread out across the room. Were you planning this from the start? You sure know your way around things, don’t you?”

“You say that, but you had the intention of being taught by Shion-san too.”

² The term “to say gyafun” in Japanese means to be argued into silence or to be made speechless. Gyafun doesn’t really mean anything and people don’t actually say it, it’s just an expression.

“Gifted people aren’t suited for teaching anyway. Ordinary people who get there through their own great effort are better at that, like Nerd-kun from our class... even if he always has snot dripping from his nose; crying over his constant losses to Shii.”

“Couldn’t you just ask this guy to teach you then?”

“No way! That guy likes to pat me on the head.”

“Just try to control yourself and don’t bite him, and please bring this wonderful person here.”

“Boys are not allowed in our club.”

“Then what does that make me?”

“Harmless beings are not men.”

“Shinomiya-kun is a nice guy, isn’t he?”

“See?”

The president was triumphant.

Gradually, the talking died down, only the studying continued.

Nothing but the sound of the mechanical pencils sliding against paper could be heard in the room.

Without even the tea, it was an unusual day for the GJ-club.



"Not so good..."

QUICK FACTS:

The School

A coed public school. Traditionally a laid back and care free place.

Currently, it has an unusually high number of freshmen, with over ten classes.

Club activities are very popular.

Ever since the old wooden school building became the Culture Club's building, any other minor club was able to get one of its spacious rooms for itself.



Chapter 19: Shoujo Manga – Part 1

After school as always. In the clubroom as always.

Sitting on his seat at the round table as always, Kyouya read a manga.

Mao sat at his side like she always did, Megumi was at the mini stove in the interior of the room, Kirara was chowing down on her meat and Shion was busying herself with one-man chess.

The usual day to day.

However, the manga that Kyouya was reading was not a manga aimed for boys as always, it was one aimed for girls, a so called “shoujo manga”. He successively flipped the pages of the freakishly thick monthly magazine in his hands.

He’d found it left on top of the table.

Kyouya had taken it wondering whom it belonged to. He thought that a girl oriented manga wouldn't be any fun for a boy, but just to be sure he flipped over some pages.

It was quite readable.

There were some stories he didn't get very well, but there were also a lot of interesting stories.

There were also a lot of romantic stories but, well, that was to be expected.

"Hu hu hu. Shinomiya-kun looks like a little rabbit caught in a trap. It seems like he's already completely immersed in it."

Megumi said. Her tone of voice didn't reveal if she was joking or being serious.

Kyouya gave her a bitter smile.

First of all, he had to confirm who the person was who'd brought the manga there.

"This is pretty fun."

Kyouya said.

Megumi nodded once and closed her eyes, bringing her hand to her chest she spoke in a bright voice.

“I think you shouldn’t say you dislike things before knowing them. Boys are certainly missing out on half of the good things in life.”

Kyouya nodded.

So that was why she’d brought it with her, another question answered. It was an awareness campaign. Kyouya would join in too.

“It doesn’t stop with this magazine’s series, I have lots of comics. If you’d like, I can bring them from volume one. If I ask the girls from my class to collaborate, we might even get some complete series.”

“Sure, I’d like that, but...”

While answering a joyful Megumi, Kyouya turned his eyes to Mao’s direction.

“Hey, president. Come on, look over here...”

Mao was facing the wall. He shook her back.

She was the person to whom he most wanted to report the new discovery he'd made.

"Hey, president. This was pretty fun, even I can read it. Have you read it, president?"

When Mao finally turned around, he opened the magazine in front of her and tried showing her the story he'd liked the most.

She turned her face away at mach speed.

"Mao can't read shoujo manga."

"Why?"

Kyouya didn't understand what she meant.

"Why...? Why doesn't she read them?"

"No, it's not that she doesn't, she can't. Not don't, but can't."

“She can’t?”

Though he’d received an explanation, he could only understand her less and less.

Why? How?

“As if I could read tha-that... Dangerous thing! The characters there kiss as if it was nothing!”

Mao shook her tiny clenched fists in the air.

“Just kissing is normal, isn’t it?”

Indeed, there were several kiss scenes in the magazine he was reading today.

“That’s why I read manga and light novels for boys! Those are safe and sound! They don’t ever do things like kiss there!”

The president swung her fists even more for emphasis.

For putting a little too much vigor into it, Mao’s hand ended up hitting the corner of the table. “Kuh~” She let out a groan and crouched in pain.

“Err...”

Mao only calmed down after Megumi stroked her hand and sang her “Pain, pain, fly away~”¹.

It was great that she’d calmed down, but now she turned her face away with an awfully sour expression.

“Er...”

“I, uh...”

Kyouya directed his voice to Mao. What was he supposed to say?

Was she just irritated? Was she sad? Was she angry at him? On top of that, did her hand still hurt?

Regardless of that, the earlobe that peeked out from her fluffy hair was deep red.

“I’ll bring a shounen manga with me next time.”

¹ “Itai no itai no tondeke” (痛い痛い飛んでけ) is a charm to cast away the pain of children. You sing it to a kid while rubbing the spot that hurts with your hand and swinging it away like [this](#).

“One without kissing?”

“You said it yourself, they rarely have any.”

“Just rarely is not good enough. Definitely, definitely, definitely no kisses.”

She repeated “definitely” who knows how many times like an enchantment. Kyouya nodded and made that promise to her.



"Kissing, I said! Kissing!"



Sign: "Continuation"



Chapter 19: Shoujo Manga – Part 2

Chapter 20

Shoujo Manga – 2

During lunch break, a few days later.

On the clubroom's round table a trade was being carried out.

“This one's safe.”

Kyouya said.

A mountain of manga and novels were piled up on the table. Kyouya was showing them to Mao before sliding them over to her.

“R-right.”

Mao nodded gravely and brought the “safe object” to her side.

If you were to ask what was safe about them, it meant that they didn’t have any kisses in them.

Mao was “that” kind of person.

The kind of person who just couldn’t get accustomed to things like that.

“T-these are okay, right? T-there’s no risk in reading them, right?”

“It’s fine. They’re safe, no problems.”

“Did you read them carefully? Did you make sure?”

They’re mine to begin with.

But Kyouya didn’t let those words out of his mouth, he replied with a firm nod.

“It’s all verified. I read them over again.”

He had reread 30 volumes for Mao's sake. It had taken him several days.

As Mao had claimed, kisses were really rare in boy oriented light novels and manga.

"Okay. Well, I guess I'll do you a favor and read them then."

"Sis."

Megumi called out from her back while facing the stove.

"Ugh... thank you... very much."

As if she was being scolded by an elder sister, Mao put on an eternal little sister's face and reluctantly corrected herself.

Somehow, having Mao show him that frail expression and speak politely to him gave him an extremely unusual feeling.

He felt embarrassed perhaps. Or perhaps he wanted to hug her.

"There really, really, really aren't any kisses, right?"

“I told you already.”

He assured her that the concentration degree of kisses was zero, like a smuggler assuring his customer that his dope is pure.

Kyouya couldn't understand what made Mao so averted to those things.

Then again, if it came to something more than a kiss, it didn't even have to be the direct act, if it had too many pointless erotic scenes, even Kyouya didn't like it.

He didn't dislike them to the point of waving his clenched little fists in the air in protest like Mao though.

Nevertheless, if he tried pointing out to Mao “You really can't handle these things, huh?” she'd get angry and deny it; even if he didn't press her any further she'd bite him in the end anyway. He'd been bitten three times already.

“So? Are these all the safe ones..? What about those?”

Another mountain of books remained at Kyouya's side. Mao spoke as she looked it with the corner of her eye.

Kyouya considered his answer for a moment.

“Is kissing on the cheek okay?”

“Uh... hmm...”

Mao let out a strange moan and made herself think.

Finally, after agonizing over it for a minute-

“Uh... uuh... i-it’s okay.”

She made her decision with a distressed face.

Kyouya just couldn’t understand why she had to think this much through this. He couldn’t even imagine what was in Mao’s blacklist.

That’s why he had to ask her first.

He moved the small mound before Mao.

“These have kisses on the forehead.”

He showed her another mound.

“That’s the same thing! You don’t have to ask about everything!”

Mao said, getting angry.

He just couldn’t understand her blacklist.

“And stop saying kiss over and over again, idiot! Have some shame!”

Mao said, her face deep red.

He was left with the last novel on his side. He still couldn’t figure out Mao’s blacklist, so he had to try asking her.

Taking the book in hands, he spoke to Mao.

“This one... well, it has a bridal carry in it. Is that... wah!”

Kyouya let out a flustered voice.

Before he could finish speaking, Mao snatched the book from him.

Mao was all over the book.

“Definitely okay!”

Mao embraced the book tightly, not letting go.

For some reason, Kyouya was sure that he’d never get that book back.



CHARACTER PROFILE:

Amatsuka Mao- Part 2

Special skills: Biting attack

Weak points: Shoujo manga, feminine malice



Chapter 21: Spider

A certain day at the clubroom.

Everybody had gathered up to enjoy tea and cake when-

A spider appeared; quite a large one at that.

Its body alone was the size of a 500 yen coin¹. With its legs spread it was about the size of someone's palm.

Wherever it had appeared from, the spider was now strolling down the round table they all sat at.

¹ 26.5 mm in diameter, roughly one inch.

“Gyaaaah! Aaah!”

Before anything else, Mao screamed. Then she flipped her chair upside down as she went to hide behind Kyouya.

“K-kill it, kill it! D-do it. Come on, do it!”

She repeatedly urged him.

“B-bu-bu-but I don’t want to get near something this big either!”

Kyouya stepped away from the table too. The spider had CD sized enormousness.

Holding his ground without running already took all of his might as a young man. To actually oppose it was too much.

“Do it! Do it! That’s a p-presidential order!”

“N-n-no way! What if it’s poisonous and it bites me!?”

“Huntsman spiders are not poisonous.”

Shion said, tilting her teacup.

The genius of games always kept her cool, no matter what happened.

“They’re not even a native Japanese species, they’ve been entering Japan since the Edo period. It’s what they call a naturalized species. Being hunter predators who don’t even make nests, just move around, these spiders inhabit human households and feed mainly on insects. After shedding 8 to 10 times, the adult’s size can surpass 10 centimeters.”

“Shi-Shion-san! Shion-san! Kill it, please!”

Kyouya left it to Shion.

However, the girl, using the same exact same tone as before-

“For ages, spiders were seen as useful creatures by the Japanese; in recent years however, due to their unsightly external appearance, they’ve started to be treated as undesirable harmful beings. Now, places that sell pesticides like home centers even sell pesticides specifically for spiders.”

She was in encyclopedia reciting mode. In other words, she was panicking.

This one was a lost cause already.

Kyouya's eyes searched for someone reliable.

The GJ club's sleeping lion, the ever eating lady, Kirara!

Kirara had her eyes wide open. The meat fell down from her mouth.

"Spider! Danger!"

In the blink of an eye she jumped back about 3 meters.

It was unimaginable that the girl who was usually just lazing around had such agility.

"Spider. Has. Poison."

"T-this one's not poisonous! It's not, right? Right, Shion-san!?"

"Its poison is composed of substances such as proteases, hyaluronidases and esterases. These are actually digestive enzymes it uses on the insects it will eat. There's no confirmation of them being toxic for humans."

"See? See!?"

“Kirara. When she was four. Bitten by spider. Almost died. Dangerous.”

“Are you from South America or something!?”

Kirara, who was speaking a lot more than usual, stood on all fours, her eyes glittered and her hair stood on end. It was the posture of an animal completely prepared for battle.

“Who cares about that? Somebody just do something already!”

“You do something then. You’re the president after all! Bite it! Bite it good!”

His shout echoed.

Pushing forward and being pushed forward, nobody wanted to take the lead.

“What’s all this commotion for?”

That’s when Megumi appeared.

“Me-Megumi-chan! A sp-p-pider! There’s a spider over there!”

“Stop! Stop! It’s dangerous! Run away!”

He and Mao screamed.

“Oh, you’re right. Hello mister spider.”

Megumi said in a completely tranquil voice. She faced the spider and greeted it.

“Come on guys, it isn’t nice to mister spider if you look so frightened.”

She stretched out her angelic hand towards the spider.

After slightly touching it with her forelimbs, the spider started climbing Megumi’s hand, going all the way up to her elbow.

“Kyaah!”

They all hugged each other and screamed.

Megumi took the spider to the corner of the room and was about to release her there, but then, following Mao’s shriek, she unwillingly opened the clubroom window and conducted the spider outside.

“Bye, bye.”

It wasn't clear if that was a wave the spider did with its paw in response to her angelic smile.

The peace had returned to the clubroom.



QUICK FACTS:

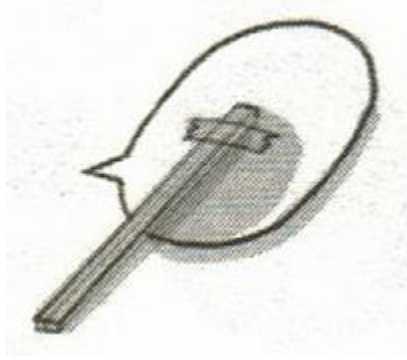
The Clubroom

A classroom from the old school building which being used exclusively for the club.

Antique furniture fills its spacious 30 tatami interior².

It also has lots of personal belongings. Toys and tea tools are particularly abundant.

² Tatami is not a precise unit of measurement, but 30 tatami should be something between 50 and 70 square meters.



Chapter 22: Grin

For some reason, Mao was cutting and gluing some craft work together.

She cut a piece of paper, put glue in it and attached it to a stick.

“Is that for homework?”

Kyouya tried asking her.

Mao looked like she was doing a homework assignment from elementary school arts class.

“It’s none of your business.”

Instead of a reply, he got a used up scotch tape roll flying towards him.

It hit Kyouya straight in the head. He didn't remember actually saying she looked like an elementary schooler, so why?

Kyouya picked up the tape roll and took it to the trash bin.

"What's that?"

"Isn't it obvious? It's a speech balloon."

Mao held a thick magic marker in her hand. She added the final touches while making squeaking sound with it.

She wrote 4 large characters on the piece.

It was no doubt a speech balloon like the ones you usually see in manga, round with the lines in them.

The characters she'd written were "GRIN".

"What are you going to do with that?"

"This? Well, you know..."

“The tea is ready!”

And so Megumi showed up carrying a tea set on a tray. She placed cups in front of Mao and Kyouya. From the smell of it, it was Earl Gray. Kyouya had become more knowledgeable of tea recently.

“Sis and Shinomiya-kun always get along so well.”

Megumi said with a bright smile.

At that instant, Mao did an abrupt leap.

With the speech balloon in hands, she jumped behind Megumi.

“It makes me kind of jealous. Hu hu hu.”

-GRIN.

Kyouya froze in his seat. When Megumi’s smile and the speech balloon Mao pointed at her entered his field of vision at the same time, somehow Megumi looked like another person for a moment.

“Huh? What’s wrong, Shinomiya-kun? You look kind of pale.”

-GRIN.

Kyouya froze again. The “GRIN” speech balloon added a horribly wicked meaning to the angel’s smile.

“Ku ku ku. Now you know Megu’s true colors.”

“Please stop that, president!”

“Is something wrong?”

Megumi turned around. Mao swiftly hid the speech balloon behind her back.

Megumi looked back at Kyouya, giggling.

“What’s this? I get the feeling you guys are hiding something from me.”

-GRIN.

Megumi sported the same smile as always.

He couldn't help but see it as a malicious smile.

"Please, just stop already!"

"Shut up. Everybody is always on Megu's side, always going on about the Amatsuka angel¹. Only I know how merciless of a girl she is. You hear me? She's a demon! She'll pull you away from your bed! Beneath this smile she's a girl with a demon's heart!"

"Eh? But if I don't do that you won't wake up, will you?"

-GRIN.

"Please, just stop already! Don't corrupt my Megumi-chan!"

"Hold on, when did Megu become yours?"

"Ah, no...that was just a poor choice of words."

¹ Megumi's and Mao's surname, Amatsuka, is written with the same characters as angel, only pronounced differently.

“Eh? No way. That’s what this is? If that’s the case, you’re going to need my consent as her older sister. First try spinning around over there three times and saying woof.”

Mao placed the speech balloon on the table and approached him while snapping her fingers.

“Come... on! I told you that’s not it already, didn’t I?”

Kyouya said while escaping away from his chair.

“Now, now, I’ll consider your case depending on your attitude. For the moment, how about you try and go get hit by a dump truck, get thrown 50 meters away and flip in the air exactly seven and a half times?”

“I’d die!”

Megumi noticed the speech balloon on the table. She took it in her hands, gave it a good look and tilted her head.

“Sis, Shinomiya-kun, look, poor Mr. Tea is losing its aroma. You better drink it quick.”

-GRIN.

Megumi said with the speech balloon in her hands.

Kyouya and Mao shivered.



“GRIN”



メグおまえってさ。
なにげに眉毛^{まゆげ}太いよな。

ええっ。
だけど抜いたら痛いですよ。

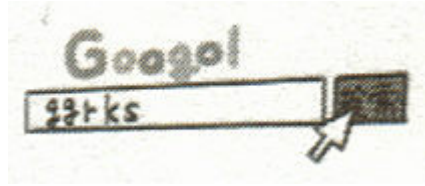


じゃ^そ剃れよ。

“You know, Megu, your eyebrows are really thick.”

“Eh? But it hurts to pluck them off.”

“Then shave them.”



Chapter 23: Looking It Up

A certain day after school.

Kyouya was doing his homework at the clubroom.

"Hey, Shion-san."

"Do you need something?"

"What was the charge on a copper ion again?"

"1 plus and 2 plus."

"Thanks."

He put his mechanical pencil to work.

At times like these, having upperclassmen around was a life saver.

“What about an iron ion?”

“2 plus and 3 plus.”

“Thanks.”

Thanks to the human encyclopedia, he was making progress on his homework. Shion was a genius who wouldn't forget anything she'd seen or heard.

He was done with chemistry. Next, he opened his loose leaf on the history pages.

“Now listen here, Kyoro.”

Mao said.

“Why don't you ask me about this stuff?”

“Hey, Shion-san.”

It wasn't that he hadn't heard Mao's voice, but he still asked Shion again.

“At the Sea of Japan naval battle in 1905 ¹, how many ships were sunk on the Baltic fleet’s side?”

“I’m sorry; I’ve never read on that, so I don’t know. Do they really teach that at first year?”

“Ah! I know that! That’s about the battle of Tsushima from World History, right? You Tougou Heihachirou² fan boy!”

The president slapped her knees laughing.

However, that was no laughing matter for Kyouya. The pressing problem of the next day drew near.

“You know, that guy was all about grandiosity. But you know, the bigger the giant the harder they fall.”

Kyouya directed an annoyed look at Mao, who kept laughing loudly by herself.

¹ A decisive naval battle fought between Japan and Russian, and won by Japan, on the Russo-Japanese war (1904-1905). It was fought in the Tsushima Strait between Korea and southern Japan.

² Tougou Heihachirou (1848-1934) was the commander-in-chief of the Japanese fleet during the battle of Tsushima.

“If that’s the problem you could find out just by looking it up, right?”

Shion said to him.

“That’s right.”

Megumi agreed with her, bringing the tea pot in her hands.

“The computer is connected to the Internet.”

Megumi was distributing the tea over everybody’s cup.

She passed by everybody’s cup three times, lastly, as she was filling Kyouya’s cup...

“Google it, faggot.”

She said, facing Kyouya.

“Huh?”

He reflexively asked her to repeat herself, thinking he was hearing things. Wishing so.

“Google it, faggot.”

Looking at Kyouya’s face, Megumi had definitely said it again. It wasn’t an illusion. He hadn’t misheard her.

“I, uh... er...”

“Google it, faggot.”

Megumi said it once more with a bright angelic smile.

“O-ok.”

Kyouya said, nodding with an admirable composure.

Had somebody else told him that, he’d lose his temper at them, particularly if it had been Mao.

But Megumi was a different story.

He'd been the one at fault for asking other people about how to do his homework. Kyouya seriously reflected on that.

"I'm sorry. President, I really should look these things up myself."

"Why are you apologizing like that to me?"

Kyouya stood up and started to go to the computer.

"Google it, faggot."

"I get it. Please, that's enough."

Kyouya asked Megumi. Having that said to him 4 times, of course he'd lose heart.

"Ah, could it be... you don't know it?"

Megumi cleared her throat and puffed her chest widely.

"This is a charm to make your search go well."

"What?"

“This one time I had this charm said to me too... ehehe. Then, when I looked up what I wanted to know I found it really quickly. I hope you can find what you want quickly too.³”

With the tea pot in hands, Megumi returned to the little stove.

“Presideeent...”

Kyouya directed a toneless voice at Mao.

Not only Kyouya, but everyone’s demanding gaze concentrated on Mao.

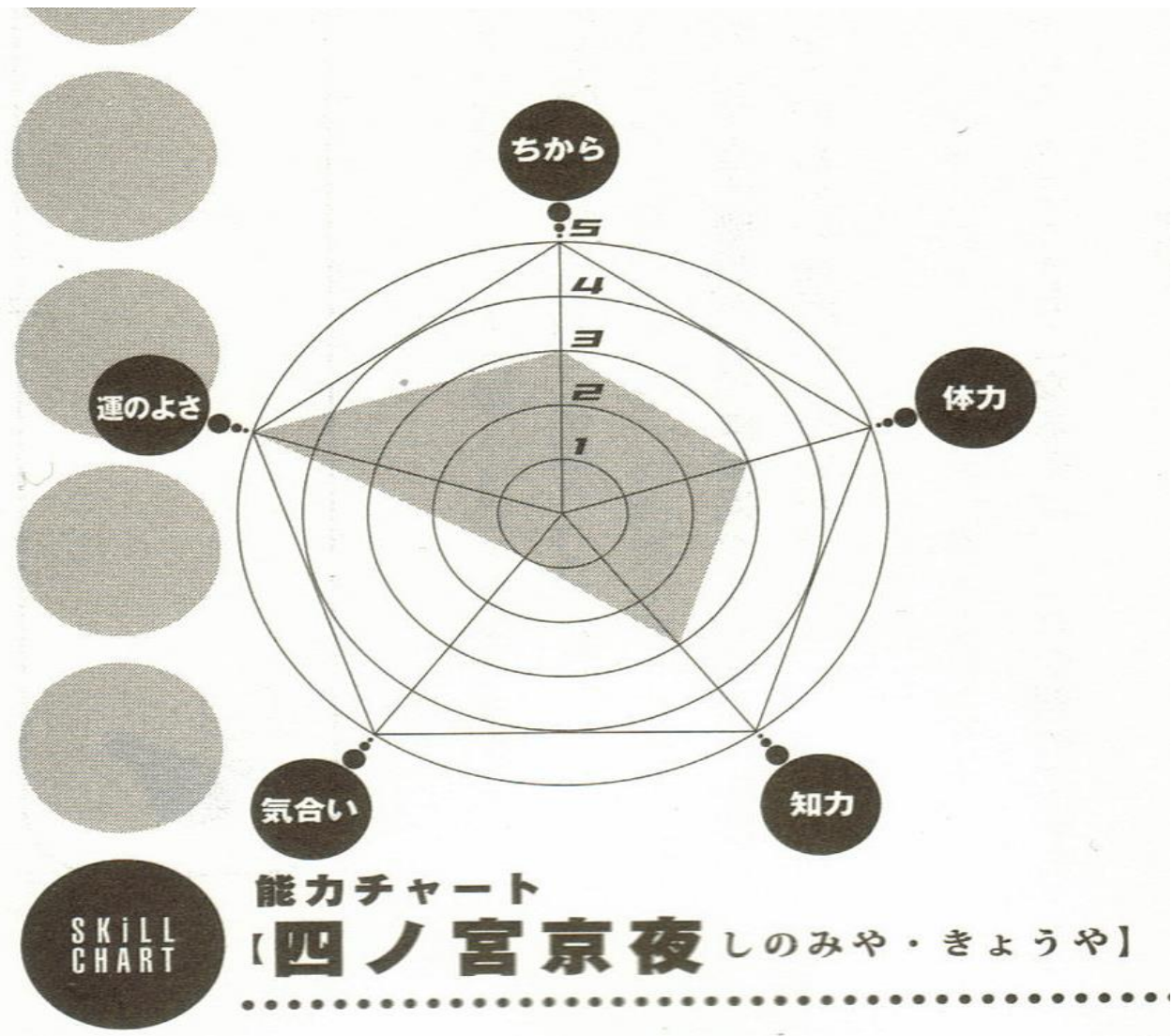
Mao quickly looked the other way.

She blew a soundless whistle.

³ In Japanese Internet boards, when someone asks a stupid question, he might get “gugurekasu(ググレカス)” or just “ggrks” as a reply, which essentially means “Google it, faggot”. Normally you’d romanize it as “Gugure kasu”, where “gugure” is the imperative form of the verb “guguru(ググる)”, to google, and “kasu(カス)” is an insult like “scum”, but the word “gugurekasu” took a meaning of its own, to the point that if you actually google “gugurekasu” you’ll mostly find information on a certain (fictional) Roman philosopher and politician named “Googlecus”, inspired by the meme. Obviously, I’m writing all of this trivia because that’s what Megumi keeps saying on the original, and “Google it, faggot.” is not really an appropriate translation, just the best I could come up with.



"A charm?"



SKILL CHART: Shinomiya Kyouya

Clockwise starting from the top:

- Power: 3
- Constitution: 3
- Intelligence: 3
- Fighting spirit: 1
- Luck: 5



Chapter 24: Want Some? – Part 1

“Yo.”

Lunch break.

Kyouya slid open the clubroom door, holding his lunch box on the other hand.

“Hm.”

The person inside was Kirara. Her voice came from her usual spot on the sofa at the interior of the room.

Following a casual greeting, he headed to his own usual spot at the round table.

He opened his lunch box.

In fact, Kyouya had been feeling a little bit nervous.

Kirara was as mysterious a person as one can get, and he thought that might just be the first time he was alone with her.

Her height was around 180 centimeters, quite large for a girl. As for her body, let's say she had a very voluptuous figure. Her short unruly hair perked up at both sides of her head. At first glance, it even looked like a pair of ears.

She was a girl of few words, so Kyouya still didn't know very well what kind of person she was.

Munch, munch. Om nom nom.

As Kyouya thought about that, the girl kept eating.

It was only natural to eat a meal during lunch break, but in this girl's case, she'd always be eating something, mostly meat. Chicken legs, spare ribs, whale strips, every day a different kind of meat.

That day she was eating an orthodox chicken leg.

It looked like something out of a Christmas feast. Several chicken legs were piled up on the large plate in front of the girl. Actually, it might be more appropriate to say several dozens of legs.

Every single day an abundance of meat would pile up there.

He'd heard that she was being sponsored by this butcher shop that dealt in all sorts of meat, from ostrich meat to frog meat. Apparently, the shopkeeper had promised Kirara a "lifetime supply" of meat. Something like being indebted with her for beating up some "bad guys".

That story had come from Mao, so he wasn't sure how far he could trust it. She could just be making it all up again.

"What's wrong? Kyoro."

He only directed a fleeting glimpse at her, but she got wind of it.

"Oh, it's nothing."

"Hm."

The girl nodded, resuming her meal.

Kyouya returned to his lunch box too, but he still couldn't stop glancing at the girl.

After finishing one chicken leg, Kirara sucked her fingers clean. Kyouya was surprised to notice how adult-like her movements and her face were as she did so.

He'd always thought she looked childish, though he couldn't really figure out women.

She does have a pretty side. He thought.

But what kind of beauty was that? Like Mao, who looked like a doll when she wasn't talking or biting you? Or idyllic, angel-like Megumi? Or maybe like Shion, who looked like a cool mature woman when she wasn't doing anything that required common sense. None of those were really her type, but she was definitely a nice person, regardless.

When he came to himself, he and Kirara were eye to eye. Somehow, they'd ended up fixedly staring at each other.

"What's wrong? Kyoro."

Her ear-like hair twitched.

No, it was impossible for it to actually move. It just looked as if it moved, right?

After taking another chicken leg, the girl stood up.

She walked on Kyouya's direction.

"Want some?"

She extended the chicken leg forward.

"Well... I..."

Kyouya started, looking up at the girl.

He'd heard it from Mao, Shion and Megumi. Though Kirara was always eating meat, she had never offered to share it with anybody else.

It seemed Mao had once told Kirara to give her a chicken leg and picked one up for herself. Apparently a big fight broke out. At the time, Kyouya was still not a member of the club, so he hadn't witnessed this great battle of beasts.

"O-okay. Thanks."

He timidly held out his hand and accepted the present.

Kirara was staring intently at him.

Under that gaze, Kyouya opened his mouth wide and was about to bite down on the meat.

A slap came down on his hand.

“Living being. Show gratitude.”

Kirara told him with a stern older sister look.

She closed her eyes and pulled her hands together in prayer. Kyouya followed suit. She never does that! In a slightly sulking mood, he thought about how he'd never seen Kirara offer a prayer to her food before.

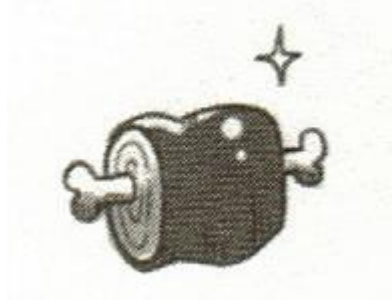
Then he realized that all this time he'd only seen her in the middle of eating.

So that's it. She only prayed once when she was about to start eating.





Sign: "Continuation"



Chapter 25: Want Some? – Part 2

Kirara's meal of the day was manga meat.

“(Hey, look at that...)”

Mao drew her face close and whispered in Kyouya's ear.

“(You always see meat shaped like that in manga.)”

“(Actually, I always see it in games. The ones that increase your stamina.)”

“(No, that's not it. It's the kind that people love to eat in TV and manga.)”

“(Well, maybe. I think we're talking about the same thing though.)”

Kyouya looked towards the far side of the room.

As usual, Kirara was sitting by herself on the worn out antique sofa.

On the table, there was a silver platter, on top of which lay a pile of the “manga meat” Mao was talking about.

They were big, round pieces of meat with a bone pierced through the center.

While holding the two ends of the bone, Kirara sunk her teeth into the meat and pulled until it tore off.

She looked delighted as she chewed.

“M-makes... makes you want to try eating it like that, huh? Doesn’t it?”

They were supposed to be whispering when Mao suddenly stopped speaking so quietly. Her cheeks flushed pink, she sought everybody’s agreement, particularly Kyouya’s.

“That’s impossible.”

Shion whispered, joining in the conversation.

“Everyone knows this already, but Kirara-san has never shared her meat with anybody. Apparently, it violates some sort of self-enforced codes that she maintains.”

“What? Say it in Japanese.”

Kyouya had somehow understood Shion’s big words, but another question popped in his mind. He tilted his head.

“Huh? She gave some meat to me the other day.”

“What?! Alright then, go get ourselves some!”

At Mao’s orders, Kyouya stood up.

He approached Kirara, stopping about a meter away, and called to her.

“Er... Kirara-san?”

There was no reply.

Just like a kitten that was shown a golden can of tuna, Kirara was completely focused on eating the meat.

She looked kinda cute... no, this was not the time.

“Er, then... Kirara?”

The girl’s ears twitched. Not her real ears, but her ear-like hair.

“What’s wrong? Kyoro?”

As if she’d just noticed him there, the girl looked at him in puzzlement.

Kyouya stared intently at the manga meat on the girl’s hand. Without the need for words, his body language conveyed his request.

“Want some?”

Kirara smiled brightly, handing him the piece that still had about 70% of the meat left on it.

“Hooray! Well, don’t mind if I do too.”

All of a sudden, Mao was already standing by their side, motioning to take one piece of manga meat from the platter.

Smack! Her hand was struck.

Mao stubbornly tried it with her other hand, but that was shot down too.

“Why?!”

Mao screamed. Without answering, Kirara silently began to eat a new piece of meat.

“Among mammals that move in packs, there are some species with established rules for dividing food. For example, animals like the wolf. The higher ranked individuals will share their food with the lower ranked ones. In other words, Kirara sees Kyoro-kun as being under her care.”

“Well, I’m her underclassman after all.”

That made Kyouya kind of happy.

“Well, I’m the president! I’m the highest ranking one here! That means I’m the one who decides how to divide the meat! Hand me a piece!”

Mao extended her hand, but she was struck again.

It made a loud, painful sound. Mao held the back of her hand.

After having her hand slapped three times, Mao finally lost her temper.

“Gah!”

Baring her teeth and using her biting technique, Mao advanced towards Kirara’s calf. However, Kirara wasn’t the type of person that allows herself to lose like that.

She bit her! Kirara bit her!

It was the first time Kyouya saw someone biting Mao!

“Let’s leave them alone.”

Giving up on the two, Shion returned to her paperback.

Kyouya followed her lead.

The meat he’d received from Kirara was incredibly delicious; the stuff of legends.



The GJ Club's Bookshelf

It's filled with material that Kyouya has been assiduously bringing in.

Its contents include boy oriented manga, light novels and so on.

Lately Megumi has also been bringing shoujo manga in.



Chapter 26: Kiss Demon

“Kyaa!”

Megumi’s scream broke the normally dull atmosphere of their typical after school period.

It sounded like she was scared, uncomfortable or perhaps like she was enjoying herself.

Upon hearing her not-particularly-frantic scream, Kyouya placed a bookmark in the book he was reading and slowly turned until he faced the other side of the room.

“What happened?”

“Shinomiya-kun~, help me~!”

Megumi extended her hand, seeking help.

She was stuck in the tight grasp of Kirara's embrace. At first he thought they were just hugging each other, as friends, but soon realized that Kirara had actually one-sidedly taken hold of the girl.

"What are you two doing?"

"Well... what are we doing exactly?"

Megumi seemed uncomfortable as Kirara, keeping Megumi in her grasp, sniffed her head, her hair and the nape of her neck.

"Kirara-san ate a whiskey bonbon... then suddenly... Hya!"

Megumi let out a scream as Kirara licked her cheeks.

"President. President."

Kyouya, who was beside Mao, pulled on her sleeves.

"Leave them alone. This sort of intimacy is normal among school girls."

Mao didn't even look up. She was too busy with a hunt in her portable game.

“Please calm down, Kirara-san! Even if you lick me, I don’t think I taste all that good.”

Megumi tried persuading her, but Kirara seemed to be getting only more and more excited. Her eyes had a strange wildness to them. “Prrrr” A purr rose from her throat in some nonhuman language.

“Hyaa!”

This time what Kirara had licked were... her lips!

In other words, they had kissed. Two girls.

“Sh-sh-shion-san... E-er...”

Kyouya, looking for support, turned towards his other upperclassman. White chess piece in hand, Shion was stiff. Her earlobe, which peeked out from her long hair, was deep red.

It wouldn’t do any good. She clearly couldn’t deal with this sort of thing.

Nevertheless, she finally came back to her senses after he tried shaking her awake several times.

“I believe there’s no reason to be concerned. That’s not a display of appetite nor libido. I’d interpret it as being a girl’s feelings of deep affection. Of course, there being no method to verify this, it’s nothing but a mere hypothesis posited by a close friend.”

“Prrrr”

Kirara let go of Megumi. Leaving the girl to collapse listlessly on the couch, she jumped across the room in the direction of the round table towards Mao, or rather, at Mao.

“Wah! Kirara, what are you... hmph... hmm!”

As she had her mouth taken, Mao’s eyes darted about nervously. It wasn’t much of a kiss, rather, her face was being licked all over. Of course, that included her lips too.

“Prrrr”

When she was done ravishing Mao, Kirara let out a groan of satisfaction from within her throat.

Her hair softly raised itself, expanding in volume.

Next was Shion's turn.

Unlike Mao, she wasn't caught off guard. However, even though she'd seen the whole scene from beginning to end, she showed no signs of trying to run away. On the contrary, she spread her arms wide open as if welcoming Kirara towards herself.

She got licked all over her face. Even her nasal bridge and her eyelids were licked.

And it seemed that last was Kyouya's turn. Kirara turned to face his direction.

Her shining eyes caught Kyouya's figure. Leaving behind a listless Shion, Kirara slowly stood up.

"No. Look, Kirara... let's all just calm down."

He stepped back towards the corner of the room holding his arms up in front of him.

"Even if it's normal for high school girls, th-this isn't right. Look, I'm a boy."

He was cornered against the wall.

Now face to face with Kirara, Kyouya was ready to accept his fate. At the same time, he was looking forward to it just a bit.

He shut his eyes tightly.

Feeling his body shiver, he just waited.

However...

Despite the long wait, Kirara's embrace never came.

He slowly opened his eyes.

"Zzz... Zzz..."

Kirara laid curled up on the floor before him, breathing slowly and steadily.

With her hair puffed up and a satisfied expression, her sleeping face seemed to indicate that she was feeling really happy.

"Huh?"

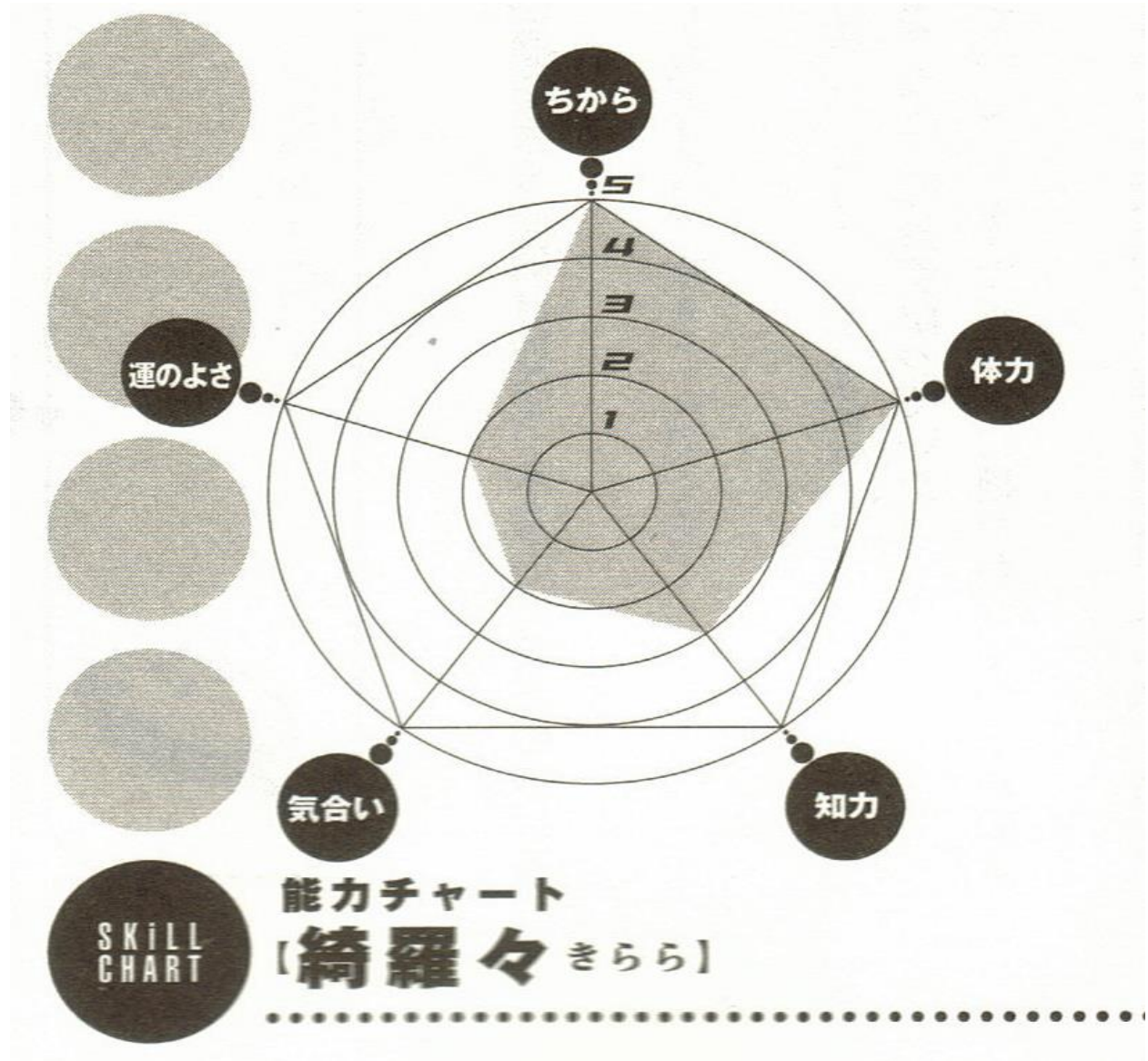
Kyouya stood up abruptly, completely dumbstruck.

From then on, it was decided that whiskey bonbons were dangerous objects on the GJ club.



"Let's forget about this. We'll just say we were bitten by a mad dog."

"It was no dog, Mao. That was Kirara."



SKILL CHART: Kirara

Clockwise starting from the top:

- Power: 5
- Constitution: 5
- Intelligence: 3
- Fighting spirit: 2
- Luck: 2



Chapter 27: Afternoon Nap

"The weather is really nice today."

Megumi said with her typically cheerful voice, as she flung the windows wide open. The wooden windows in the old school building were unusual in the sense that they were western, opening in the center and swinging outwards.

The sweet breeze of spring streamed into the room through the open window.

"Ah... it really is the perfect weather for taking an afternoon nap, isn't it?"

Following Megumi's gaze, Kyouya looked at the sofa in the room's interior.

He saw Mao sleeping on the spot where Kirara would usually be sitting.

Her small body was completely accommodated on the sofa, almost like a bed. She didn't seem to be uncomfortable in the least.

Megumi continued watching her sister sleep for a while before turning to face Kyouya. Bringing her finger to her lips, she whispered “Shh”.

He smiled back at her.

Kyouya sat backwards on a chair, relaxing his back and letting his chin rest on his arms as he watched Mao’s sleeping figure. Watching a girl sleep like that had an almost criminal feeling to it.

She was a girl, after all.

Megumi went to prepare some tea. She measured the amount of leaves for three people; everyone except Mao and Shion.

Mao continued the steady breathing of sleep.

Kirara, having had her seat taken by Mao, was now sitting on the president’s usual chair, and, perhaps intending to stand as a replacement for her, was also reading a shounen manga. For some reason she kept consulting a dictionary.

All of a sudden, Mao slowly sat up.

“Piroro, piro piro~ ♪ piruru~ruriruri~ ♪”

With eyes half open, she mumbled something in a strange, rising melody.

Then, she fell back on the sofa almost as suddenly as she sat up.

Once more, her breathing returned to the normal rhythm of sleep.

“Wha...what was that just now?”

Kyouya asked before even thinking.

He found himself staring at Shion, Mao’s close friend.

“Oh, that’s just Mao’s...”

Shion nodded. She turned her eyes upwards as if looking for the right words.

“What was it called again? You know, the things they put in some programs like anime right before and after the commercial break...”

“Hmm... Eyecatches?”

“That’s it.”

“By it, you mean...”

“That’s what it is.”

“Huh?”

Kyouya had no idea what she was saying.

“She’s likely switching from a bad dream.”

“How can she do that?”

“Who knows? But I think it sounds like something Mao would do.”

“Right...”

Shion knew Mao better than anybody else. However, even if he had complete confidence in her words, he just wasn’t satisfied with that explanation.

Megumi brought them the tea. Kyouya took a deep breath of it’s aroma.

He forced himself to bring the topic back.

“Hum, Shion-san... was it the president who called it eyecatch?”

“No.”

Shion said, with a finger raised.

“It’s my own theory, built on observation and conjecture. And just as in any scientific field, I’ve devised experiments to confirm my conjectures.”

“Hmm... experiments?”

“Observe.”

Shion smiled mysteriously and walked up to Mao’s side.

She knelt down and leaned close to Mao’s ear before whispering.

“Mao, at this moment, before your eyes, there is a portion of delicious meat buns. A huge pile of them. They’re amazing!”

Mao's expression changed into a goofy smile.

Shion whispered into her ear again.

"Oh no, Kyoro-kun is here! He's eating all of your meat buns! And he's holding you away by the forehead, so your angry punches can't reach him. Oh, the humanity!"

Mao started groaning in agony.

Then, she slowly sat upright.

"Piroro, piro piro~ ♪ piruru~ruriruri~ ♪"

She fell back on the sofa.

Her sleeping was peaceful once again.

"See?"

Having demonstrated her theory successfully, Shion grinned.



CHARACTER PROFILE:

Shion – Part 2

Subject she's best at: None in particular. (She's good at all of them.)

Subject she's worst at: P.E. (Things that require you to move the body are an exception.)

Hobbies: Teasing Mao



Chapter 28: Convenience Store Bags and Cup Noodles – Part 1

Kyouya had recently started having his lunch in the clubroom.

He saw no need to continue having unromantic lunches with his friend Yokomizo when he could always find someone in the clubroom.

A beautiful someone, that is. A beautiful girl, to be more specific.

He opened the door and entered the clubroom to find Shion there. “Yo” she greeted, lifting her head to look at him.

“What’s uuu-” Kyouya began to ask, before he noticed it.

A bag from a convenience store rested in front of Shion.

He had expected her to bring her usual three-tier, stacked lunch box wrapped in purple cloth.

He'd heard that Shion had a lot of siblings, so she had many brothers who were much older than her. Perhaps it was their genes, but they were all geniuses in some way. Apparently, Shion being a "genius of games" was just a result of her bloodline.

The one who made her lunch box every day was her second oldest brother. He was a master chef... or something like that. He had mastered every method of cooking that existed on the surface of the Earth, and ones that didn't as well... or something like that...

Kyouya didn't believe in any of that, of course. It was obvious that she was just having a laugh at him.

Well, it was at least certain that she had a brother who was an amazing cook and also made her an amazing lunchbox everyday...

The contents of her multi-layered lunchbox were always beautifully arranged, drawing everybody's attention. Shion would always share two thirds of it with them.

Except for today. Today, she had cup noodles in a bag from a convenience store.

Kyouya thought that something must have happened, but even he had enough tact not to ask her directly with a "What happened?"

He took his usual seat at the round table and quietly began to eat his own lunch.

Shion, rather than sitting at the table, went for the spot on the sofa where Kirara always sat.

The sound of Shion fumbling through the plastic bag could be heard.

Somehow, Kyouya was curious.

He wasn't even paying any attention to the taste of his own lunch.

All he did was listen for a while, but soon he couldn't take it anymore.

Unable to control himself, he sneaked a glance in Shion's direction.

"Did I perhaps make you curious?"

She'd caught him looking after all.

"My brother is currently out on a trip to the bottom of the North Atlantic to stock up on some ingredients he needs for an Ultimate Full Course order he received."

Shion started the conversation as if she already knew everything Kyouya wanted to ask. She had this peculiar way of talking to you. Almost as if she was psychic or something.

“It seems that Cthulhu sashimi is essential for the carpaccio in the first course.”

“What’s a Cthulhu?”

“Some variety of squid, I believe.”

Kyouya was satisfied with her answer. Being a cooking master seemed like a very tough job, having to go all the way to the bottom of the Atlantic to stock up on ingredients like that.

Still, he was glad she wasn’t fighting with her brother or anything.

Having regained his peace of mind, Kyouya returned to his meal. This time, he could enjoy the taste of the food properly.

However, Kyouya put down his chopsticks after a bit and turned to face Shion again.

“Is something wrong?”

Shion's hands were frozen as she stared at the convenience store's receipt.

"Actually, it seems that there's something missing from the total price."

The girl emphatically tilted her head.

They probably forgot to charge her for something.

If that was the case, she could just call it a profit and leave it at that. Shion really is an honest person, I guess.

"The fee for this white bag was not included in the price."

Shion said something strange.

"Sorry?"

"This white polyethylene bag..."

She pointed to the convenience store bag.

Kyouya felt all the energy drain from his body as he realized what she was saying.

He was lying face-down on the table for no more than a few seconds before he pulled himself up and explained to her.

“That one’s free, actually. The plastic bags are a courtesy of the store.”

“Is that so?”

Shion wrapped her head around the idea.

Kyouya turned his back to her, feeling awkward. The look that Shion had fixed of him had something of admiration in them... But knowing such an ordinary piece of common sense couldn’t really be worthy of any praise, nor was it anything he could take pride in.

She wouldn’t stop looking at him. He was being targeted by the smart, older girl’s look of respect.

He learned one thing from that.

It seemed that The Genius of Games was lacking in common sense.



"It's not here."



Sign: "Continuation"



Chapter 29: Convenience Store Bags and Cup Noodles – Part 2

Kyouya didn't let his guard down.

After returning to the table, he carefully watched Shion, who sat towards the left behind him, as he started to eat his lunch.

She now had the cup noodles in front of her.

She'd gotten as far as removing the plastic wrap around it, but didn't seem to be making any progress beyond that.

All she had to do now was open the lid halfway and pour in some hot water. If the lack of hot water was the problem, Megumi's kettle was always full.

Shion made a move.

She was opening the lid.

Or so he thought. Instead, Shion pulled the whole lid out and threw it away.

Uh-oh.

Shion then took the dehydrated Noodles out of the cup, held it with both hands like a hamburger, and brought it towards her wide-open mouth.

“Wait, wait, wait! Wait a minute!”

Kyouya jumped up, unable to hold himself anymore.

“What are you doing, Shion-san!?”

“Well, I was just eating my meal.”

She said, holding the circular chunk of noodles in her hands.

He tried to convince her to, at least, put the noodles back in the cup for the time being.

“I’m quite sure I saw Mao eating them like this the other day though...”

Shion was showing some unusual resistance.

“That was Chicken Ramen¹! Sure, you can eat it like that too! But that’s just like eating a giant Baby Star²!”

Shion jumped, surprised at his reaction.

It was then that Kyouya realized he’d been shouting.

He took a deep breath, taking a moment to calm down.

It was probably her first time eating something like cup noodles.

She had never prepared cup noodles before, which is why she didn’t know how. She didn’t even know about convenience store bags! That had to be the case.

As her knight of common sense, he had to explain to her in detail.

¹ A popular brand of instant noodles. Some people like to eat it raw with the flavored powder that comes with it.

² A snack that literally consists of small pieces of dry ramen with flavoring.

“This here is called cup noodles.”

“Yes, I’ve wanted to try them for a while now.”

Shion nodded with an earnest expression.

“But my brothers wouldn’t let me, saying it wasn’t good for the body, so I’ve never actually tried it. Not just bro-two, but even bro-four stopped me, and they even say that bro-six eats it as many as 7 a day. Don’t you think that’s unfair?”

Kyouya nodded, even though he didn’t really understand it well.

It was quite fun seeing Shion getting so emotional from wanting to eat ramen and showing him the unknown side of her; inadvertently calling her brothers by their personal, intimate nicknames “bro-two”, “bro-four” and “bro-six”.

“Cup noodles are simple and tasty. It just takes pouring some hot water and waiting three minutes.”

Shion listened as Kyouya continued his explanation.

“The way you do it is... let’s see... look, it’s written right here.”

He picked up the neglected lid that she had discarded and showed it to her.

“I’m sorry. I have a principle to never read the instructions.”

How do you learn the rules for the games you play then? What about that chess primer you showed me the other day? He was about to ask her, but instead wondered whether he had calmed down yet or not.

Right now what he needed was the patience needed when dealing with little children.

“First you put in the flavored powder. Next, the seasoning. Then, you pour in hot water until it reaches this line drawn on the inside.”

Kyouya prepared the noodles, explaining each step to her as he followed the instructions.

Shion, with a serious look on her face, payed close attention to everything he did.

He borrowed a three minute hourglass from Megumi’s tea corner and placed it on the table, allowing the green sand inside to flow. To replace the missing lid, Kyouya used a plate.

They both waited, staring at the cup until the sand had finished falling.

He opened the cover and...

A soft, enticing smell enveloped them.

Shion's face sparkled with excitement. It contrasted with her usually sophisticated appearance, but it was still kind of cute.

She was having trouble again with figuring out how to separate the chopsticks, so Kyouya did it for her and handed them over before returning to his chair.

He didn't want to bother Shion, seeing as she seemed to be enjoying the food a lot.

As he half-heartedly ate his lunch, he revised his impression of Shion.

It seemed that the genius of games was completely lacking in common sense.



Master Siblings?

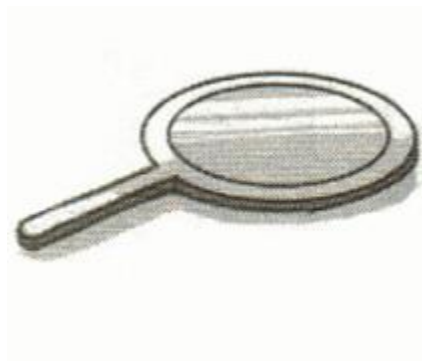
Shion's bloodline carries a genius trait.

Among her brothers and sisters, everyone is a *master* at something.

Shion is a "game *master*".

Her second oldest brother is a "Cooking *master*".

Her lunchbox is always prepared by her genius brother.



Chapter 30: Beauties

“I was wondering...”

Mao suddenly said from the tea table.

Megumi and Shion, who were having a laugh together, turned to face her. Kirara, who was chewing on some meat, tilted her neck.

Kyouya, who was reaching for a cookie, stopped as well and looked at Mao.

“Among the four of us, who do you think is the prettiest?”

Mao said, for some reason, while facing Kyouya.

“Eh?”

"I was told in my class that everyone in our club is beautiful. I never really paid attention, but now, when I stop to think about it, we aren't that bad."

Mao said, taking a good look at each of them.

As her calculating eyes swept across the room, Shion, Megumi and Kirara all adjusted their posture in their seats.

"And so I started wondering what you guys think."

"Why did you ask me?"

"Well, you know, you're the guy after all. You can be the judge."

"No way. I don't want to judge you guys."

"This guy just said he'll desert us in the face of the enemy. I think an execution by firing squad is in order."

Kyouya looked around at everyone.

The usually peaceful mood of the clubroom had been blown away in an instant.

“W-wait. L-look, you know... Er... Err... Megumi-chan...?”

He gave Megumi a desperate look, begging her to help him.

“It’s fine, isn’t it?”

He received a bright smile in response.

Even though Megumi could be an angel, she was unexpectedly fond of competitions, and an extraordinarily sore loser.

“Shion-san?”

Kyouya faced Shion, hoping that the cool and logical girl could explain the pointlessness of this.

“I understand that the practical significance of things such as games and contests is non-existent. However, isn’t it precisely because of this lack of significance that we derive pleasure from them? I reckon that the essence of pleasure lies in leisure. In that case, if it’s pointless, we can say that the pleasure of it is, to some degree, beneficial. Also, this is in accordance with the principles of this club’s bylaws.”

He got a thesis in response, which was of no help to him.

“What about... Kirara?”

He didn't think it would do him any good, but he still tried asking the last person who could help him.

“Kyoro. Who do you like?”

“Y-you idiot! You! What!? What are you saying!? That's not it! We're just asking him who's the prettiest! Pay attention to the conversation! Where the hell did you get this idea from!?”

Mao exploded in anger, turning bright red. She spouted a lengthy protest against Kirara for about three minutes before settling down. In the meantime, Megumi prepared everybody's tea, setting down an hourglass and putting the black tea leaves to steam. Shion read a few pages of her paperback.

Kirara kept facing Mao, but she wasn't listening at all, even yawning occasionally.

“So, who's the prettiest?”

Kyouya's wish that the entire thing would end unresolved was not granted.

“Well, when your mouth is shut, I think you're very pretty, president.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?”

“Practically speaking, if you’re not talking and if you don’t bite-... Ouch! Ouch! That hurts!”

After pulling away from Mao’s teeth, Kyouya turned to face Shion.

“Shion-san is the most intellectual one, I think.”

“Y-yes. W-well, I wouldn’t hesitate to acknowledge that.”

“Megumi-chan is kind and the most feminine, I think.”

“Yay. Thank you.”

“Hey, Megu, he didn’t actually say that you’re pretty.”

“And Kirara...”

Kyouya turned to face Kirara, the last one.

He searched for flattery words. The only word he couldn't use was "pretty". He searched for a word that would praise her strong points. It was a survival technique, finding the keyword that would grant him victory and allow him to go on living.

"Err..."

As he gazed at her, Kirara tilted her head. He faced the girl and started talking.

"Err... Kirara is... The most eccentric? She's got gap moe."

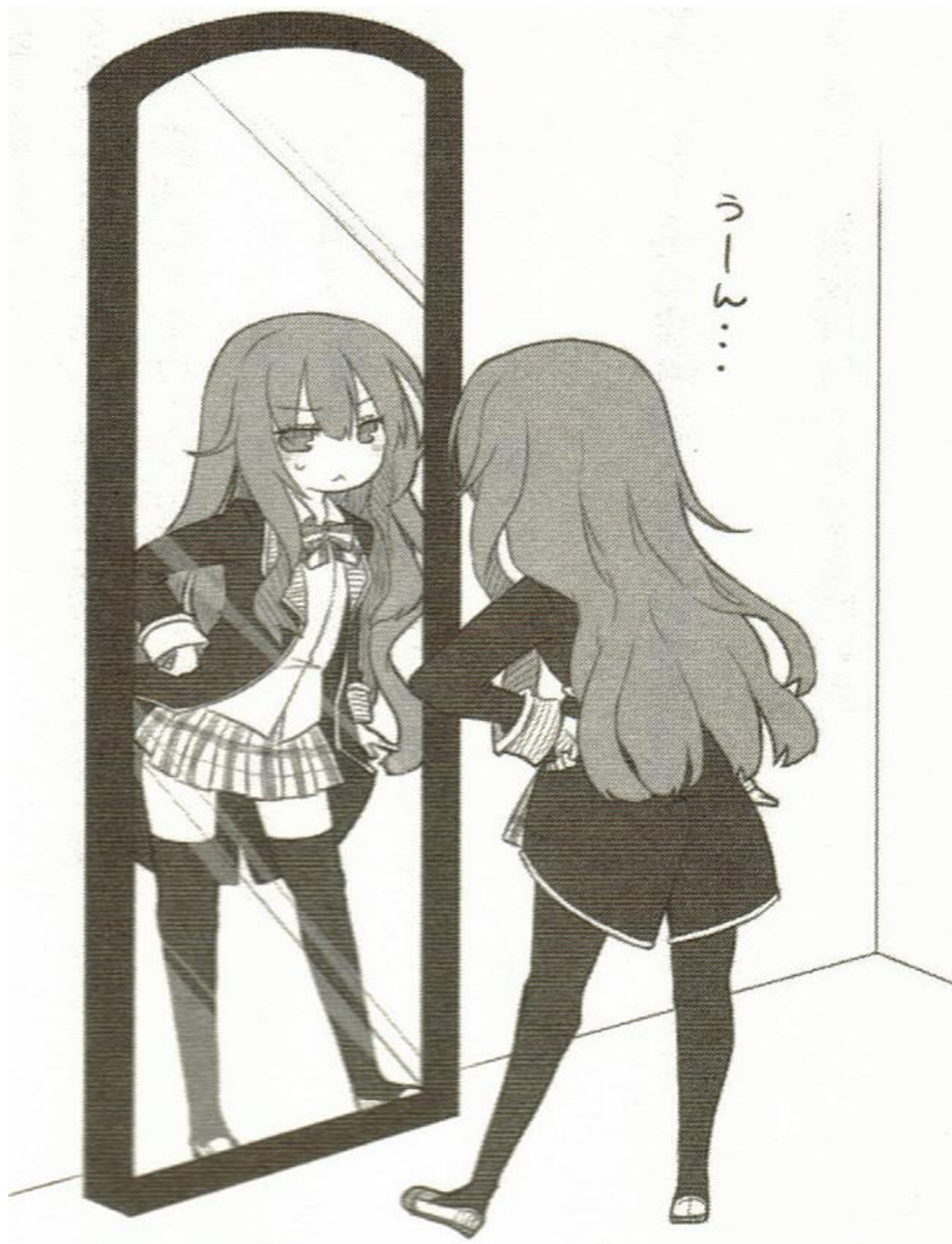
"Moe, huh?"

Mao slapped her knee.

"Moe is one thing, it has no relation to beauty, right? Well, to sum it up, it's a tie between the four, right?"

Mao smiled with satisfaction.

Kyouya didn't really understand, but things seemed to be settled, so he let out his breath.



"Hmm..."

CHARACTER PROFILE:

Kirara – Part 2

Likes: Everyone

Dislikes: Danger



Chapter 31: Grooming Time

In the clubroom, as always.

Megumi was brushing Mao's hair.

Her hands followed the long hair that covered Mao's small back. Despite the monotony of it, she carefully repeated the movement over and over again.

While sitting straight, facing sideways on the chair, Mao had her back facing Megumi. She was so docile that it looked as if she was another girl.

This was not uncommon in the GJ clubroom.

You could see it every day.

"Mao's hair tangles up so easily, after all."

The fact that Kyouya had been staring at them probably prompted Megumi to say that.

Kyouya nodded understandingly.

Girls sure had it rough. Then again, he wasn't a girl, so he couldn't really know what it was like; he could only imagine.

The brush moved up and down.

It brushed Mao's bright, chestnut colored hair.

Mao, Megumi, and Kyouya were the only ones in the clubroom.

Having finished the novel he'd brought along with him and having nothing else to do, Kyouya just sat there, watching Megumi brush Mao's hair..

"Hm, Hmm..."

Mao sounded like she was clearing her throat and fidgeted repeatedly on her chair. For some reason, she wouldn't settle down.

He continued to watch them, before-

“Want to do it?”

Megumi said something unexpectedly.

“Eh?”

“Well, Shinomiya-kun, it looks like you want to.”

“No, not at all, I didn’t mean to...”

“Want to do it?”

Cutting through his excuse that he was just lazing around and had nothing to do, Megumi offered the brush to him.

She could be a scary girl.

Kyouya sincerely thought that. Megumi was the kind of girl who would say something blunt with that bright, angelic smile.

Mao straightened her back and quietly sat in the chair.

Her back wasn't really telling him not to.

Mao was the kind of person who would say "no" clearly if she didn't want it, he thought.

It should be ok then.

She wouldn't bite.

That's how he interpreted Mao's reaction of turning her back to him without saying anything.

Kyouya pulled up a chair next to Mao.

"Here you go."

He took the brush from Megumi.

Kyouya was honestly interested in this.

As a matter of fact, he was very interested. He had been curious about Mao's hair for a long time.

His pulse quickened a bit as he slid the brush through her fluffy hair.

“If the brush get’s stuck, go back and start again. Don’t try to force it. If you do, you’ll pull out her hair and make split ends.”

Megumi stood besides him, giving him guidance.

Mao’s hair was very stubborn. It was fine, but also voluminous.

He could not do it quite as smoothly as Megumi.

“If it’s too tangled up, it might be better to brush it with your hands first.”

The realization that he could touch it with his hands surprised him.

Somehow, a twig emerged as he started to untangle the worst spots.

Just where have you been playing around, president?

Kyouya thought silently, as he continued brushing.

Mao let her hair in his care, silently as well.

Megumi left to go make some tea.

Mao fidgeted in her chair, changing her posture without saying a single word. She didn't bite either.

Kyouya kept working with Mao's hair until the tea was ready.

By the time he was nearly finished, Mao, who had kept her back straight the entire time, was already starting to slouch. She had left her hair and her back at the care of Kyouya.

"The tea is ready!"

Megumi called with a bright smile.

Unfortunately, the announcement signaled the end of hair-brushing time.



"He actually wasn't half bad..."

CHARACTER PROFILE:

Shinomiya Kyouya – Part 2

Philosophy: Pacifist Defeatism

Motto: “The safe and peaceful way is to lose from the very start.”



Chapter 32: Punishment Game – Part 1

“Ah!”

When he realized it, it was already too late.

The sound of porcelain breaking echoed through the room.

He had accidentally pushed a teacup off the table with his elbow.

“Oh, man.....”

Kyouya directed a long glance to the floor.

He recoiled his shoulders at the horrible scene spread out before him.

The white fragments of porcelain were spread inside a sea of black tea.

“Pay-back! Pay-back!”

“Oh! Don’t worry, I’ll take care of it.”

Mao immediately started singing a childish one-man chorus while Megumi flew towards them with a cloth and a dustpan in hand.

“Sorry, I broke it.”

Despite wanting to help, Kyouya only watched her.

“It’s fine.”

Megumi courteously said while skillfully cleaning up the fragments.

Kyouya felt nothing but shame.

“Oh, dear. And it had to be Megu’s favorite cup.”

“Eh? Is that true?”

“Please, don’t worry about it.”

“How old were you again? Nine? When you got it from grandpa as a birthday present, right? It came in a five cup set.”

“I was ten actually. But I told you, it’s fine.”

“By the way, our grandpa has already passed away, you know?”

“Re-really?”

Kyouya started to tremble.

Such a precious thing-... I b-broke it.

“I’m sorry!”

Kyouya bowed with force enough to break about 10 roof tiles with his head.

“I’m telling you, it’s fine. Everything breaks sooner or later anyway.”

Megumi said while gathering the fragments.

“I think this teacup must have been very happy. To be able to properly fulfill its purpose for all of its lifespan... and in the end, to have someone like Kyouya-san, who treats everything with care, to be the last to use it, I’m sure it was delighted.”

She was indeed an angel.

“Well said Megu! That’s right. Grandpa is gone too. Maybe if he’d lived up to 108 he’d have been able to go peacefully. But that’s how things are. Actually, wasn’t this his last present to you?”

The little devil king called president wasn’t about to let him off the hook.

She sported a broad grin while her eyes searched her own hair for split ends.

However, this time things went just as Mao said.

Kyouya felt embarrassed for expecting her to let it go with nothing but an apology.

“I’m sorry! I don’t think just saying this is enough but... I’m really sorry!”

“Honestly. I’m saying it’s fine, am I not?”

“If I don’t do something as an apology I won’t be at peace with myself.”

It was the last present she’d gotten from her old grandfather when she was ten, and he was dead now. In other words, it was a memento. And Megumi had treasured that...

“Then what can you do that’ll make you let it go, Shinomiya-kun?”

Kyouya raised his face.

Having finished picking up the pieces of the cup, Megumi now waited for Kyouya’s answer. She’d placed her hands on her hips and put on an unusual troubled expression.

And the one troubling her was himself.

“Ask me anything you want. I’ll do whatever I can.”

“Alright, then. Let’s do a punishment game.”

“30 laps around the school!”

Mao said.

“Roger!”

As Kyouya was about to run off, he was grabbed by the nape of the neck.

“No, not that.”

“3000 squats!”

“Roger!”

Kyouya started doing the knee elasticity exercise right there. Megumi stopped him again.

“Not that either.”

Pressing a finger between her brows, which were quite thick and imposing for a girl, Megumi put herself to think.

“Alright, 100 times should be good enough.”

She eventually said with a bright expression.



Chapter 33: Punishment Game – Part 2

“Okay, we’re ready.”

Megumi said, sitting on the chair.

Two chairs had been placed facing each other at the center of the room. On the other chair, sat Kyouya.

“And what kind of punishment game is this?”

“Kyoro. Did bad thing?”

Shion, who’d been playing chess by herself at the inner part of the room, and Kirara, who’d been eating meat at the sofa, came over with curious looks on their faces.

At the center of the group, Kyouya and Megumi sat while facing each other.

The “punishment game” Megumi had talked about consisted of calling her name 100 times in a row.

Is something like this enough? Kyouya wondered, feeling disappointed. He’d already been carrying the resolution to do 3000 squats.

“Okay, here I go.”

“Okay.”

For some reason, Megumi closed her eyes.

Feeling a bit tense, Kyouya started the “punishment game”.

“Megumi-chan, Megumi-chan, Megumi-chan...”

“Yes?”

Getting a reply like that just as he was taking a breath, Kyouya forgot to speak.

That was unexpectedly embarrassing...

“Hey, you’re only at three yet.”

After returning the look Mao gave him, Kyouya continued.

“Megumi-chan, Megumi-chan, Megumi-chan, Megumi-chan... Megumi-chan, Megumi-chan, Megumi-chan, Megumi-chan...”

“Yes?”

Megumi was nodding back while smiling.

At around the tenth time Kyouya realized it.

That was one fearsome punishment game.

To think up this kind of punishment game... Megumi was a fearsome girl.

“Megumi-chan, Megumi-chan, Megumi-chan, Megumi-chan, Megumi-chan, Megumi-chan, Megumi-chan, Megumi-chan, Megumi-chan...”

“Yes?”

“Isn’t it a pain to keep saying ‘chan’ over and over again? Just drop the honorific. As her older sister, I’ll allow it.”

Mao mocked him.

Kyouya didn’t give Mao a reply. He just continued to call Megumi’s name.

“Megumi-chan, Megumi-chan, Megumi-chan, Megumi-chan, Megumi-chan, Megumi-chan, Megumi-chan, Megumi-chan, Megumi-chan, Megumi-chan...”

“Yes?”

Megumi nodded along with a completely serene voice.

Kyouya was already red. How many times has it been already? He wondered in his spinning head.

“Come on! Just one more!”

Mao said.

He didn’t believe her at all.

“He’s now at the 31st time I think, so he’s got 69 times to go, right?”

Shion said. 69 to go. I’ll do it all at once.

“Megumi-chan, Megumi-chan, Megumi-chan, Megumi-chan, Megumi-chan,
Megumi-chan, Megumi-chan, Megumi-chan, Megumi-chan, Megumi-chan...”

“~~~~~”

“(Omitted)”

“~~~~~”

“Megumi-chan, Megumi-chan, Megumi-chan, Megumi-chan, Megumi-chan,
Megumi-chan, Megumi-chan, Megumi-chan, Megumi-chan, Megumi-chan...”

Wheezing and breathing roughly, Kyouya wondered absentmindedly how many times he’d said it. He was feeling dizzy from the oxygen deprivation.

“Come on! Just one more! Whoo, whoo.”

He glared hardly at Mao as she mocked him.

She was saying the same thing just a moment ago. There was no way he'd believe her.

"I won't fall for that one, President."

"It's true, you're at 99."

Mao said bending her finger. He wasn't falling for that.

"Ah!"

Megumi's voice cut in.

Her mouth had fallen open.

"Ah!"

Kyouya realized it too. His mouth fell open accordingly.

The rules were as follows: "Calling Megumi's name 100 times in a row."

“Well, guess we’ll have to start over from the beginning, right?”

She had the smile of an angel.



Chapter 34: Punishment Game – Part 3

“I’m next then.”

After the second round of her punishment game came to an end, Megumi left the chair.

Just as Kyouya was reclining his exhausted body on the chair, Mao quietly sat on the chair opposite to his looking as if she was expecting something from him.

“Sorry?”

“I just told you. Next is my turn.”

“Sorry?”

Kyouya was perplexed.

What are you saying? I don't speak presidentese very well.

He turned to Megumi, seeking help.

"Um, well, it was just Megumi-chan... right?"

"This guy! I can't feel a shred of good faith in him! He's not feeling like apologizing at all!"

"Why do I have to apologize to you?"

"Come on, it's fine! We're taking turns, otherwise it's unfair! Oh, is that it? Just because I'm your senior you're going to discriminate me!? I object to this seniority discrimination!"

"You lost me."

"Fine, let's do it like this then, next is my turn and in return I'll give you one of my acorns."

"No thanks."

“A-are you saying you won’t do it for less than a cicada shell? You’re quite stubborn, huh? Alright, I’ll settle for that.”

“I’m telling you, no thanks.”

Severing eye contact with Mao, Kyouya turned to face the other two.

“Come on, won’t you two say somethi...”

As soon as he saw them, he froze.

Their chairs had been put side by side, forming a line. Shion and Kirara sat on them in expectation.

“Er... Shion-san? Kirara?”

Shion quickly averted her gaze, feigning ignorance. Kirara sat like a dog on the chair, looking as if she might even start wagging a tail.

They’re hopeless.

“Change of rules then. Everybody gets their turn!”

Megumi proposed, giggling.

Without losing her angelic smile, she'd changed the rules.

"Good luck, Shinomiya-kun. I'll be heating up some water. I'll make you some caramel macchiato for your throat."

Kyouya averted his eyes from Megumi's smile.

He sighed.

And so he turned towards Mao.

"Alright... here I go."

"Loud and clear, okay?"

The president waited for him to start with sparkles in her eyes.

Somehow things had gotten out of hand.

“President, president, president, president, president, president, president, president, president, president, president...”

Mao was sitting politely looking almost like a french doll.

“President, president, president, president, president, president, president, president, president, president, president...”

She was listening to him with with a bright and affable smile.

She was definitely up to something.

“President, president, president, president, president, president, president, president, president, president, president...”

Kyouya wanted to put and end it quickly. He put as many repetitions as he could in each breath and uttered them as quickly as he could.

“~~~~~”

“(Omitted)”

“~~~~~”

“President, president, president, president, president, president, president, president, president, president, president...”

That was the 99th repetition.

The next one was going to be the last one.

“Presideeent! There! That’s exactly 100 times!”

How’s that for you? Was all he thought in his pride.

He’s made no mistakes in counting. It had been perfect.

However, Mao was still smiling.

Kyouya was taken by a bad presentiment.

“Sure, but you know...”

The girl opened his mouth without breaking her smile.

“My name is not ‘President’, it’s Mao.”

Kyouya dropped his shoulders in defeat.

“I want to hear it 100 times.”

He had 100 hells waiting for him.



Kyouya: "My throat hurts."

Mao: "So good!"

Shion: "Hmm, it's good."

Megumi: "They're really tasty."



Chapter 35: Punishment Game – Part 4

After a little break, it was now Shion's turn.

"Um... Ahem! Er... if perhaps you don't feel well doing this I won't force you to."

Shion said after sitting on the chair before Kyouya.

She kept endlessly fixing her hair.

"Well, we came this far already. I'll do it. You want to make me do it too don't you, Shion-san? Why else would you line up with the others?"

"Not at all. If you don't feel like it, I don't think there's any need for you to force yourself to do this kind of punishment game. It's just that, in view of the principles on which this club was founded, and me being a club member, I judged that I should participate in this club activity and-..."

Now that you mention it... Kyouya thought.

It's been almost two months since I joined this club and I still don't know what essentially the GJ Club does.

I don't even know how to read it's name right.

What does the GJ stand for?

At first he'd thought it might stand for "Good Jaw Club", a club where you work on your jaw to make it good; the president had immediately bitten him after all. But that idea didn't seem very likely.

Well, whatever.

"...-I mean, according to Freud, every sort of conflict or urge has it's roots on the libido. Therefore, it's not strange at all that people of different races and ethnicities share common dreams and desires, right? In other words, logically speaking, I'm forced to recognize that the necessary conditions for me to deny what you suggested have not been met."

As usual, Shion was stuck in her encyclopedia mode. By the looks of it, her field of expertise of the day was psychology.

“Is that all?”

He thought he might as well ask.

Shion nodded while pushing her hair behind her ear again.

“Alright, can I start then?”

“Y-yes. We should hurry up and finish this. Kirara is waiting in line too, after all.”

Shion said, conscious of how Kirara was there beside them.

“Kirara-sa.... I mean, just wait a little bit more, okay?”

“Kirara. Wait.”

The girl was sitting on top of the chair with her legs pulled up and crossed.

At first glance it could have looked like an extremely impolite way to sit, but curiously, in Kirara’s case it seemed like a dignified pose.

If he called her Kirara-san, with the honorific included, she'd just correct him saying "One Kirara. Not Three." or something like that.

However, he just couldn't get used to talking to a girl who was his senior and older than him without honorifics.

Kyouya looked back at Shion.

"Okay, here I go."

"R-right. Please be gentle with me."

Shion stiffened her expression, giving herself a cool beauty.

Suddenly feeling himself tense up, Kyouya began.

"Shion-san, Shion-san, Shion-san, Shion-san..."

"Uh.... Hmm..."

Shion pulled her eyebrows inwards, making a serious face.

“Shion-san, Shion-san, Shion-san, Shion-san, Shion-san, Shion-san...”

“Hmm... This... is quite something...”

She started writhing herself.

“Shion-san, Shion-san, Shion-san, Shion-san, Shion-san, Shion-san, Shion-san. •

Kyouya’s voice was somehow getting progressively more passionate too.

“Shion-san, Shion-san, Shion-san, Shion-san, Shion-san, Shion-san, Shion-san.”

“Ugh..... Hm..... No... I...”

Shion tilted her head back as if trying to get away from his voice.

Kyouya leaned forward and rose from the chair.

“Shion-san, Shion-san, Shion-san, Shion-san, Shion-san, Shion-san, Shion-san...”

“Ho-... How many it times has it been already?”

“He’s still at 32.”

“No! No! I can’t take it anymore! That’s enough. Let’s leave it at that.”

Shion said, swinging her head from side to side.

“Can’t do that. If you don’t go to a hundred you’ll have to do a penalty game too.”

Of course, Kyouya nodded in agreement to Mao’s words.

And so, at the 50th repetition, Shion gave up. However, Kyouya was already enjoying himself too much to stop.

At the 70th time, Shion let out something like a “Hyau!”, but Kyouya continued nevertheless.

By the time the 100th repetition came, Shion was sitting limp on top of the chair.



Chapter 36: Punishment Game – Part 5

The last in line was Kirara.

“Sorry for the wait.”

Kyouya stood in front of Kirara and loosened his necktie to let some air in, refreshing him from all the heat.

“Hm.”

The girl, who had been waiting on top of a chair with her arms around her knees, slightly nodded her head.

A strange girl she was.

Ever since Kyouya had joined the GJ-club they'd spent almost 2 months together in that room, but he still couldn't figure her out.

She gave off a very animal-like feeling.

However, that was not a domesticated animal like a cat or a dog. She was more like a wild, indomitable beast. The kind that could land you in jail if you tried to bring her inside national borders.

"Kirara's turn?"

From her chair, Kirara glanced around the room.

Megumi was preparing tea. Mao, who'd seemed a bit too quiet up till now, had taken the club's camera and was taking pictures of the penalty game. Shion fanned herself with a desk pad.

"Er... this is my penalty. I have to call out Kirara-sa... I mean, Kirara's name one hundred times. Is that okay?"

"Uh huh."

Kirara nodded.

She let her knees down and sat properly on the chair, facing him.

I shouldn't be thinking about these things.

It felt a little weird that she understood his words so quickly.

"Alright, here I go."

Keep took a deep breath and immediately started.

"Kirara, Kirara, Kirara, Kirara, Kirara..."

"Hm."

"Kirara, Kirara, Kirara, Kirara, Kirara, Kirara, Kirara, Kirara, Kirara..."

"Wow, no honorific! You're getting pretty cheeky there, Kyoro!"

Mao started to provoke him.

He ended up becoming self-conscious about it and started feeling embarrassed.

“Kirara, Kirara, Kirara, Kirara, Kirara, Kirara, Kirara, Kirara, Kirara...”

“Hm.”

Kirara bent one by one the fingers on both hands.¹

Kyouya was already flushed bright red.

“Hm, it looks like you’ve come to understand my embarrassment now. However, you offered me no mercy then, and so I can’t help you now. Even history’s oldest code of law, the Code of Hammurabi, already expressed the idea of equal retaliation in the phrase ‘eye for eye, tooth for tooth’.”

“And then God added: “‘Hyau’ for ‘hyau’”²

Mao provoked her. In response, Shion pulled on Mao’s cheeks, testing the limits of their elasticity.

“Kirara, Kirara, Kirara, Kirara, Kirara, Kirara, Kirara, Kirara, Kirara...”

¹ She’s counting Kyouya’s words.

² Mao’s referencing Shion’s squeal at the end of the previous chapter.

“Hm, hm, hm.”

As she folded her fingers, Kirara’s face was growing more severe.

“Kirara, Kirara, Kirara, Kirara, Kirara, Kirara, Kirara, Kirara, Kirara, Kirara, Kirara, Kirara... Come on! Kirara!”

“Hm.”

Kirara had given her best. Kyouya too, had given his best.

“One hundred.”

Kirara said. The girls fingers were all folded down now.

“One hundred.”

The girl announced one more time. She raised her head and directed a smile at Kyouya.

Mao had fixed the camera on top of the table. She’d left it recording with the lens facing them.

She and Shion pushed themselves between Kyouya and Kirara, standing side by side.

“Hey, Megu. Come here for a sec. Get in the frame. Whatever, just come.”

Mao called Megumi over.

They all lined up side by side.

Somehow, it felt like a commemorative photograph. The camera was rolling all of the time though.

“Wait! There’s still 30 seconds left. Isn’t this cool?”

What sort of face am I supposed to make for 30 seconds? Kyouya was forcing a smile.

Kirara drew his attention with her finger.

With something in mind, she drew her face closer to his and whispered something to him in a soft voice so no one else could hear.

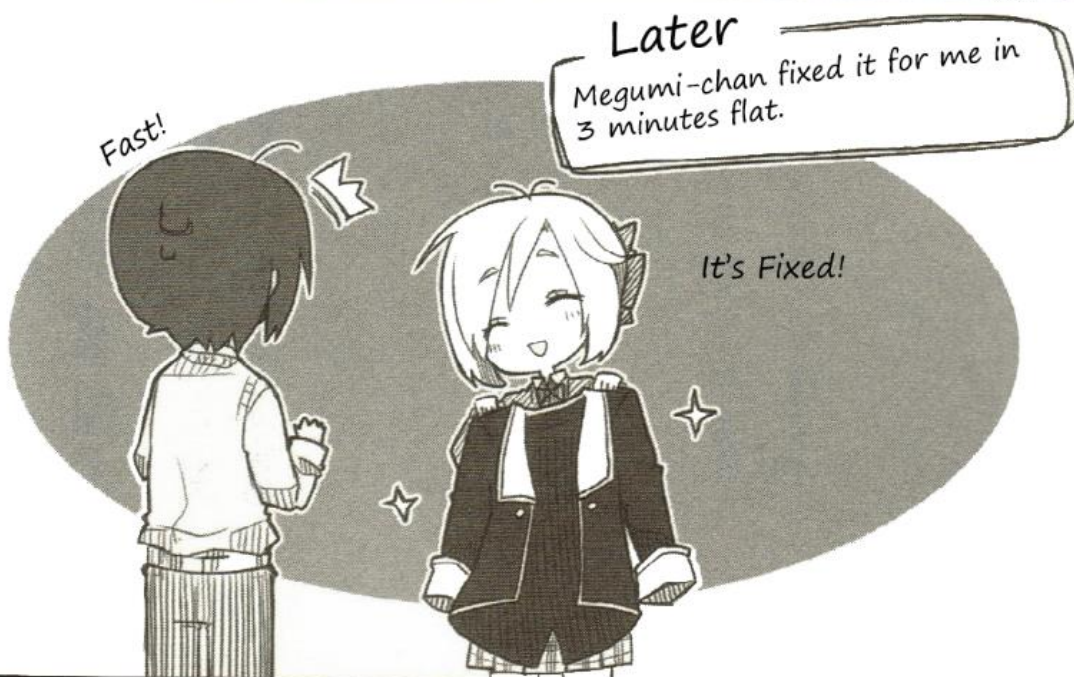
“One Kirara. Not a hundred.”

A mysterious smile spread right in front of him. Kyouya could tell that smile was telling him that she'd meant to keep it a secret from everybody else for his sake, and so he smiled back.





The Sewing Master



Afterword

Nice to meet you here through Gagaga Bunko, my name is Araki Shin. For those who are reading the afterword after reading the book and for those who started off by reading the afterword, hello to you all.

So, I might be getting ahead of myself here, but as you can see, this product is a bit different from the usual novel. I wanted to start by writing a manual-like explanation for it, or perhaps you could call it a presentation to the way you should read the book.

This novel, GJ-bu, is a "4-koma novel". Rather than just one short story, it is a collection of short, 4-paged stories, amounting to a total of 36. As for the content, they're about the easygoing protagonist, Shinomiya Kyouya, who after joining the GJ-club, a club whose activities are a mystery, spends nice and comfortable days along with the other 4 eccentric members of the club.

The novel is filled with short episodes of his days of eating, drinking tea, being teased, getting embarrassed, being bitten, etc... It's a warm, uplifting slice of life kind of story.

The story isn't really profound and there aren't any particularly deep themes, instead, the book is packed full of casual dialogues between the main characters that might get a laugh out of you. You'll find one illustration on every chapter, and in total there are over 40 illustrations!

Regarding the chronology, the novel is roughly set during April and May, just as the new school period is beginning but before the change of uniforms.¹

However, the chronological order of the chapters is a bit lax. They aren't precisely ordered according to the time of the events.

In other words, go ahead and start reading from wherever you like. If I were to give a recommendation as the author, I guess I'd say to read from the beginning in order. Also, chapters marked with 1 and 2 work as a set. Still, there's no problem if you want to just open at a random page and start reading from there.

Don't worry too much about stuff like where you stopped reading the day before. Whenever you're on the train on the way to work or school, or on the 10 minute interval between classes, or maybe if you just have a few minutes of free time, you can simply pull out the novel, open it and read the chapter you come up with. Then, when you run out of time, you can just as simply put it away. If you only read it in this carefree way, enjoy the casual chats of Kyouya and the girls, and if perhaps you come to like these characters, well, nothing could make me happier as an author. Each chapter has only 4 pages so I'm sure you can finish one in a few minutes. You have my guarantee. "4-koma novel" is just a promotional line, but it's actually true that each chapter has 4 pages.

That's about it for the explanations. Now, I'd like to talk my motivations for writing this novel. (My editor said to me: "Shout it out!") So, here's my shout.

If you were to ask me why I wrote a novel like this, well, I wanted the kind of story that I could get a quick chuckle out of and be done with it, something I could read in a more carefree way, something lighter than a light novel, like a soft and fluffy tea time.² These ideas had been in my mind for a while. I've always loved slice of life. When watching anime, I'm the kind that gradually loses interest as the ending of the story approaches and a lot of twists start to happen, like when they take

just the character that I'd grown to like and kill him off for the sake of the climax. That's just kind of... (Cries) Give me back my Michel! I'll even allow you to use a misdiagnosis as an excuse!*

(*Obs: Michel is a character from Macross F; coming back to life from a misdiagnosis is what happens to Captain Okita from Space Battle Yamato. Those two are obviously different works, so we can conclude that this author is suffering from disorientation.)

You don't need to move on with the plot! You don't have to conclude the story! You can just develop on the characters' daily life!

Many times over I'd think that.

"The story is there just for decoration! Conceited people don't understand this!" I believe is what a young man from the Zeon maintenance crew said.³

It was at the end of last year when the idea for "GJ-Bu", a product focused on the characters rather than the story, started to crystallize in my mind. So, with my proposal in hand, I wandered around the industry until I managed to be picked up by Gushiken-san of Gagaga Bunko. I'd like to thank Gushiken-san for all of the valuable advice he gave me on the direction the novel should go. And to put out a novel with 40 illustrations was quite the aggressive move!

That's right, least I forget, I'll talk about Aruya-san who made the illustrations. In real life I'm a very shy boy so I didn't have the chance to say this, so I'll take this

opportunity, making use of the power of writing to make this into a confession: Thank you very much for drawing those wonderful illustrations. The world you created in your drawings, along with the Mao, the Shion, the Megumi and the Kirara in it had an amazing feeling to them. I personally liked them all very much. I am deeply grateful to you for taking those characters I created out of text, granting them form and shape and bringing them to life in this world. I'm really glad we were able to make this character based novel full of illustrations together. It wasn't easy, huh?

Now, regarding the 2nd volume, it will all depend on sales, but the preparations for it are already underway. I think it would be nice if we could release it in June, three months after this first volume, though things are still in the planning stage, so I don't know how it will turn out. The next volume should take place in summer, between June and August, so it would be nice if the time in the story and the time in the real world were to match.

Now that I'm done talking about the novel, let me introduce you to my home page.

<http://www.araki-shin.com/>

↑ This address is for people using a PC. If you're using a mobile device, please use the following 2D barcode.

<image>

(For those whose device does not have a camera, please use this adress:
<http://www.araki-shin.com/araki/keitai.htm>)

The mobile version is currently opening for trial. The content is all text-based to make it lighter on your packet fee. I wasn't sure how to make it, but I did my best. I'm not much of a mobile phone user, so I'm afraid it's not that hip, but I'd be happy if you could pay it a carefree visit and enjoy it.

What!? People don't say "hip" anymore? Oh boy.

Last of all, I'm sorry that this sounds like an advertisement but... Yokomizo-kun, Kyouya's classmate whose name we get a glimpse of in this book, is actually a side-character from another series of mine, as is Ninomiya Shuuji, the author of the light novel Kyouya is frequently reading. It's being released under another company, but "Akarui Kazoku hou Keikaku!" is currently on its fourth volume and still being released. If you're the kind who like a nice and comfortable slice of life like GJ-Bu, you might feel like reading a real love story every now and then. When that time comes, go ahead and take a look at this series.

February, 2010

Araki Shin

¹ The Japanese school year starts in April. Soon after, students switch their winter uniforms for their summer uniforms.

² Probably a referencing K-on!

³ He's referencing a line from Mobile Suit Gundam (1979) which became very popular in Japan. In the original, a mechanic tells Char Aznable that the legs in the mobile suits are there just for show, but the big-wigs don't understand that.

Project Leader and Translator : Bj-Bu

Supervisor : Whitesora

Editor : DJ Tezzie

Typesetter : Yon Devil Hands

Translation Group : NanoDesu Translations